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OR, THE

BUCKSKIN BOSS BOY.

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AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL'S CRACK-SHOT
PARD," "BUFFALO BILL'S BOY MASCOT,"
"NEW YORK NAT" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I. TWO SHOTS.

"I'll kill him now, for he is within easy reach of my rifle. With him dead, I dare go East and enjoy the fruits of years of toil. He it was who kept me from reaping the benefits of that toil, and of my first deed of crime for gold, which I love as I do life.

"THERE IS THE CAMP," ANNOUNCED BUFFALO BILL AS THEY LEFT THE STREAM.

"Yes, he will pass nearer than he is now; then I will send a bullet through his heart, if he is in the midst of a hundred of his gallant soldiers."

"They can fire at me, but their bullets will pelt the rocks harmlessly, and, flying to my horse, I can be off like the wind, with no one to pursue, for they cannot reach this ridge without riding for miles around."

"Now, Carrol Doan, colonel in the United States Army, your minutes of life are numbered, for I will kill you."

The speaker was crouching among some rocks upon a rugged ridge a hundred feet in height, that overhung a trail along which a party of horsemen were traveling.

In the front rode two men in buckskin, one a rough-looking fellow, sunburned, long-haired, and bearded, with small, dark, piercing eyes; the other, a splendid specimen of the beau ideal plainsman, tall, with a magnificent form, broad shoulders, graceful, and a perfect horseman, while his face was one to see and remember a lifetime.

The former was the guide of that wild country, the latter was Buffalo Bill.

Behind them rode a cavalry command, escorting the colonel commanding Fort Belvue, a post lately established in the Indian country, and with him were several officers, while following in an ambulance were two ladies and a girl of fourteen.

It was of Colonel Carrol Doan the words were spoken which open this story, and who, little dreaming of a hidden foe near—an enemy of the by-gone, who had recognized him at a glance even in that far-away land—was riding confidently on his way back to the fort, after a long ride to the distant stage line to meet his wife and daughter.

Nearer and nearer he drew to the spot where his foe lay in ambush. All were talking pleasantly as they rode along, no one suspecting evil, or danger, or a tragedy.

The two men in buckskin, Buffalo Bill and Indian Dick, the guide, had passed beneath the shadow of the cliff upon which the intended assassin was lying in wait.

His deadly bullet was not for them.

Following directly after them was a lieutenant and a score of troopers; then came Colonel Carrol Doan, the victim destined for death; then several officers, and next, the ambulance with the ladies, a light army wagon with baggage, some pack animals, and some forty troopers bringing up the rear.

Who would look for a sudden death in the very midst of such a guard and escort?

But, crouching among the rocks, the man upon the cliff had his rifle leveled, his eye ready to sight along the barrel, and aim at the heart, where a glittering medal on the colonel's breast sparkled in the sunlight.

The lurking assassin was a man whose years had silvered his temples, whose face had been bronzed by long exposure and life in the wilderness.

He was dressed in buckskin from moccasins to cap, his hair and beard hung almost to his waist, but he was a person of commanding presence in spite of his being in hiding there to kill a fellow being, one who knew of the first crime of his life, a deed that had sent him a fugitive into Western wilds, to live apart from human kind.

Nearer and nearer rode the colonel, and more firmly the ambushed man grasped his rifle; lower he crouched; his eye ran along the sights, and then his finger touched the trigger.

There came a puff of smoke, a sharp report, and Colonel Carrol Doan felt a severe blow as there followed a sharp sound of metal ringing against metal; he reeled in his saddle, but quickly recovered himself, as the bullet had struck the very center of the heavy badge he wore and was arrested by it.

It was a sudden shock and momentary pain, but the colonel never lost his nerve, and glancing up toward the cliff, cried:

"There he goes! Fire on him!"

There, dashing along the ridge to cover was the form of the intended assassin, and two score carbines began to crack as the troopers threw them to their shoulders and began to pull trigger.

But the form bounded on, and disappeared, just as Buffalo Bill came dashing back from the front.

Instinctively he took in the situation—that the colonel had been fired on from the cliffs, and, seizing his long lariat, he was whirling it rapidly around his head, his eyes fixed upon a broken pine growing forty feet above on a shelf of rock.

All eagerly watched the scout, saw the coil leave his hand, beheld the noose circle over the broken limb, and then, with his rifle slung at his back, they beheld him rapidly ascending to the ledge.

They saw him climb on from there upward, some twenty feet, drop on one knee, throw his rifle to his shoulder, take a quick sight, and fire.

A moment after Buffalo Bill disappeared from the sight of those who were watching him.

CHAPTER II. THE BOY HERMIT.

Seated in front of a stoutly-built cabin of rocks and logs which stood close in under overhanging cliffs, at the head of a canyon that widened into a valley below, was a youth of seventeen perhaps, though his look of manliness and stern determination, his well-developed form and natural air of perfect self-confidence caused him to appear older.

His face was a fine and striking one, frank, fearless and handsome, while his complexion had been bronzed to the hue of a redskin, though his dark blue eyes and golden hair, worn long, showed that there was no trace of Indian blood in his veins.

He was dressed in buckskin, beaded and embroidered with porcupine quills dyed in gay colors, and his moccasins were well made, while upon his head sat jauntily a cap made of the plumage of birds, and handsomely made, too.

The youth wore a revolver and knife in his belt, and, as we see him, was engaged in cleaning an old-style but serviceable weapon—a rifle and shotgun combined, one barrel being rifled, the other smooth-bore for shot.

In the meadow land down the valley half a dozen Indian ponies were grazing, and as he glanced up from his work the youth suddenly started and muttered:

"Something is frightening the ponies—a mountain lion, I guess, so I'll go for him."

The ponies had raised their heads and trotted away from the trail, but as the youth rose, having just finished his work, there came into view a horseman riding in a run.

"Why, it is father!"

"But, what can be the matter with him, for see how he reels in the saddle! There! he nearly fell to the ground then!"

Putting down his gun, the youth darted down the steep trail, leading from the ledge of rock upon which the cabin stood, and, reaching the spot where the horseman had halted, was just in time to catch him in his arms as he fell from his saddle.

"Oh, father! You are wounded!" cried the youth, in dismay.

"Yes, Don, and a death wound it is!" groaned the man, as the youth raised him in his strong arms, and, bearing him up the steep path, placed him on a cot in the cabin, the act showing wonderful strength for one so young.

"Father, I will see what I can do, for it may not be so bad."

"I know, boy, for it is given to mortal to feel when the hand of death is upon him."

"Who gave you the wound, father?" asked the youth, as he tenderly drew off the hunting-shirt to examine the wound.

"See what you think, before I tell you, for I know that the old Indian chief, Big Medicine, taught you well while you lived with him."

The boy had now exposed the wound—a bullet-shot in the right side, almost under the arm, and glancing at the red stream welling up to the lips of the man, he shook his head, while he took from an old morocco surgical case a probe, and with perfectly steady hand began to search for the bullet.

The man awaited with pallid face and anxious look the decision of the boy surgeon, as though with perfect confidence in his skill.

"Father!"

"Yes, Don."

"The bullet has entered too far for me to find it, and—"

"The wound is fatal," came with a groan.

"I fear so, for the blood forcing itself from your mouth shows that it cut through the lung."

"I knew it, and my hours are numbered."

"Just as I began to hope that we might go out of this wild hermit life and live among our fellow-men, with riches to care for us, Don, the end has come, at least for me, and I am to find a grave in this wilderness, where for so many long years I have hidden away."

"Don't talk, father, for it gives you pain."

"I care not for the pain of the wound now; the suffering is all here, and here, boy, in heart and brain!"

"I must talk, for I have much to tell you, for as the aged pass away the future opens for the young."

"Your life is just begun, as it were, though the years that you have seen have been hard ones, but the future is before you, and I wish to talk, to tell you what that future will be for you."

"Never mind me, father, for I'll get along all right."

"But, I do mind you. Ah! I must not delay, but tell you what I would not die and leave unsaid."

"You know that you are not my own son; that I found you in the Sioux village four years ago and bought you from Big Medicine, the chief."

"You know, too, that they, the Sioux, massacred the wagon train your parents were with, and spared you only because you fought them like a little tiger, standing over the dead body of your mother and father, and with the latter's sword, boy of nine though you were, you killed two braves!"

"I believe you know that renegades—white men among the Sioux—spared you, though they instigated the attack on the train."

"The Indians, as you know, are superstitious about charms, so they would not touch the gold locket hanging to a chain about your neck, and containing the miniatures of your father and mother, and which you still have."

"On it were their names, but a bullet had cut across them and erased all but the last part—'don,' and so I called you Don."

"You have nothing else by which to discover who you are, should you wish to do so. My God! how I suffer!"

"Father, tell me who gave you that wound, and I will avenge you!" earnestly said the youth.

"Never! The man who shot me twice has saved my life, and I brought the wound upon myself—Don, I deserved it," was the low response.

CHAPTER III. THE BURIED LEGACY.

The youth seemed impressed by the words of the man whom he called father, in saying that he deserved the death wound he had received.

He saw that the man was suffering greatly: he knew that he was growing weaker and weaker.

Realizing this, also, the old hermit again began to talk.

"Don, I looked back as I reached my horse and saw the man who gave me this wound. I knew him, for no one could mistake him for another, once seeing him."

"He did not know me, I am sure, for the distance was too great, and I was in the shadow down the ridge. How he ever reached the spot where I saw him Heaven only knows, or how he hit me at that long range I cannot comprehend, but hit me he did—wonderful shot that he is."

"What had you done, father?"

"Boy, I was on the ridge, watching some soldiers coming along the trail, and the man who was at their head was the man who shot me."

"There was another guide riding by his side, whom I knew, and I also very well know that he is there to lead them into a trap, for it is Indian Dick, the Renegade; so I will be avenged, after all, though I would be sorry to have Buffalo Bill die that way. But he always escapes somehow, and his luck will not desert him this time, I feel sure—at least I hope so."

The boy started, seemed about to speak, glanced out of the door anxiously, but said nothing, and the old hermit resumed:

"The leader of those soldiers was a man lately sent to the frontier here, the commander of the new fort. I knew him at a glance, and I determined to kill him."

"How had he wronged you?"

"It is too long a story to tell, but if he had not wronged me, he had made me a fugitive, and kept me from returning East and enjoying my fortune."

"With Colonel Carrol Doan dead I had nothing to fear, so I sought to kill him. I hope that I did so; yes, my aim is too true to fail me; but I certainly heard his voice call to his men to fire on me. I escaped a perfect hail of bullets, to get this one here from the rifle of Buffalo Bill, when I deemed that I was perfectly safe."

"Now, Don, I am going out of life, and you are to be my heir. You know that we have picked up considerable gold here in the mountains, and you know where it is hidden. It is yours, every grain of the precious metal, and there are thousands of dollars' worth there."

"But this is not all; I have another legacy for you."

"Years ago I buried a treasure I was never able to enjoy. How I got it matters not, but it is mine, and I leave it to you, also. It is in the East, and in the old leather case you have seen me so safely guard you will find a map and description of just where to find it."

"Go first by day and locate the spot; then by night, in a boat, and alone, to dig it up."

"It amounts to far more than the gold we have here, and all together you will have a fortune to enjoy when you go East."

"Fortunately, I received a fine education, and have thus educated you. The books I have here, and which you have read, have told you much of life and the world, though you are a boy hermit, yes. I may say, half an Indian, from the training you have received, though I well know you hate the Sioux bitterly, and I do not wonder—ah! it seems as if my very heart had been torn open by that bullet, for the pain grows more and more intense as I become weaker."

The boy did what he could to relieve the sufferings of the dying hermit, and then again sat down by the side of the rude bed to await the end.

Glancing about the cabin his eyes fell upon his own bed in one corner, the rude household goods, some weapons on the wall, a violin, a number of pencil sketches, and a shelf of books.

Humble as it was, with the fort seventy miles distant the nearest habitation of white men, with the Indian village forty miles distant in the mountain, and the now dying man his only companion, the boy hermit loved his home, loved the wild life he led.

Whatever the man had been in the past; whatever the brand of crime that had driven him a fugitive from his fellow-men; to him he had ever been kind and gentle, indeed a father, and he dearly loved him.

But one shadow was between them—the fact that the old hermit was the friend of the redskins, while the boy was their implacable foe for the terrible wrong they had done him in the slaughter of his parents.

Minutes passed away and the man had not spoken. His breathing had grown more labored, and at last his breath came in gasps, until, suddenly, it ceased.

Was he asleep?

The boy bent over him.

Yes, it was the sleep of death.

Tears ran down the browned cheeks, but the boy did not give way to his grief.

Something seemed to be upon his mind, for he said:

"I must go at once, for he said Indian Dick was guiding them, and that means to their death."

"It was at the ridge, he said, and over two hours ago, so I have not a moment to lose."

With this he folded the hands upon the breast, closed the door of the cabin after him, seized his rifle and a saddle and bridle, and ran rapidly down into the meadow land.

Catching a fine Pinto pony with his lariat, a moment after he was in the saddle and riding rapidly down the valley on his volunteer errand of mercy.

CHAPTER IV. AN ARRIVAL IN CAMP.

When Buffalo Bill had fired his shot from the top of the cliff, he was seen to wave his hat about his head and then disappear.

Colonel Doan had quickly decided that he had not been wounded, but had had the closest call of his life.

In the decoration hanging just over his heart, a badge won for bravery on the field, the bullet of the intended assassin had half-flattened itself, and, becoming imbedded there, had remained so firmly fixed that it would require to be cut out.

"I shall let it remain there, for it does not disfigure the decoration," said the

colonel, and he submitted to the surgeon's earnest wish to see if the severe blow of the checked ball had done any harm.

Fortunately it made only a severe bruise, and all congratulated the colonel that it was no worse.

"Who was it that fired the shot, guide?" asked Colonel Doan, of Indian Dick.

"I didn't see him, sir. Was it a boy?"

"No, a man, with long hair and beard."

"Like as not some gold hunter as has struck it rich and wants ter scare ther bluecoats out o' ther country."

"Well, he takes the wrong way to do so, for had he killed me there are many more to step into my shoes," Colonel Doan responded, sternly; but then he asked:

"Why did you wish to know if it was a boy who fired on me?"

"I knows that thar' is a boy dwells in the mountains, one as was raised by ther Injuns, and I has heard him called the Boy Hermit, sir."

"This was no boy, but a man, for I got a fairly good look at him; and if Buffalo Bill's shot did not bring him down he bears a charmed life, for all the men fired at him and he had a deadly gantlet to run along that ridge."

"Yes, sir; he knew just where ter hide, for yer can't climb up that cliff fer a mile either side of here."

"Buffalo Bill managed to do so, guide."

"Yas, sir; but he's out o' ther run of ordinary men, from all I has heerd o' him; for who else w'd hev' thought o' throwin' a lariat up to yonder tree and climbing it?"

"No one; but, if you can climb, suppose you go up and see what has become of him, and we'll go back to the little stream we crossed half a mile back on the trail and camp there for an hour or two."

Indian Dick, the red guide, went up the lariat without trouble, and, watching him, they saw him climb the rocks to the top of the ridge and disappear just where Buffalo Bill had gone out of the sight of the soldiers.

A couple of soldiers were left under the cliff with the horses of the scout and the guide, while the command turned back to a good camping place half a mile in the rear, on the trail.

There it was decided to wait the return of Buffalo Bill and Indian Dick.

"I do not like that guide, Indian Dick; but he has been a trapper out here for years and knows this country thoroughly, as he has shown us, so we must depend upon him, as Buffalo Bill, having just come to the fort as Chief of Scouts, is in a wholly new land to him. However, it will not take him long to know every trail and get acquainted; then I will let the redskin trapper go back to his traps."

So said the colonel to several of his officers who were gathered about him, while they were discussing the cause of Buffalo Bill's delay in returning, whether he had killed or wounded the intended assassin, and why Indian Dick, also, remained away.

In an hour more Indian Dick returned and reported that he could find no trace of Buffalo Bill, and the nature of the ground was such that, being on foot, he could not track the scout.

He, however, stated that he had seen where a horse had been staked out beyond the ridge—that the trail showed that the animal had been ridden rapidly away, and he had followed the tracks for a short distance.

Supposing that Buffalo Bill had gone off on the trail of the horse, as it was getting late, he returned to suggest to the

colonel that the command move on to a little valley, where there was a splendid camp ground, with water, grass and wood in plenty.

This the colonel decided to do, leaving a sergeant and several men to await the return of Buffalo Bill at the cliff and report where they were.

So on to the little valley the command moved, halting there to go into a night camp, all being much pleased with such a good resting place.

"I can go and try and find Buffalo Bill my own self, sir," announced Indian Dick, as soon as they arrived in camp, and the colonel giving his consent, the redskin guide rode away.

Hardly had he been gone half an hour when a horse and rider were seen coming rapidly toward the camp.

As he drew rein just before the group of officers and, leaping from his Pinto pony faced them, all were surprised to see that he was a handsome, sun-burned, well-formed youth, clad in buckskin, and wearing a picturesque cap of feathers.

CHAPTER V.

THE WARNING.

All eyes were turned upon the youth as he leaped from his spotted pony, that was panting from a hard run, and giving a half salute, half bow, asked:

"Who is the chief of these soldiers?"

As he asked the question the youth glanced around him and beheld Mrs. Doan, Nita and the wife of an army officer at the fort.

He seemed suddenly spellbound at the sight, and his gaze, which in another would have been a stare, was in him a look of deepest wonder and interest.

"I am the commander, my young friend," answered the colonel, struck with the appearance of the youth.

But there was no turn back to Colonel Doan, for the eyes were riveted still upon the two ladies and little Nita Doan, who in turn were regarding him.

"Have you any business with me, young man?" asked Colonel Doan, somewhat sternly, as he saw that the youth paid no attention to his former remark.

"They would massacre them as they would men, as they did my poor parents, for the Sioux show no mercy; no, not to angels, if they came to earth."

The words were uttered in a low tone, but were heard distinctly.

All who heard them saw that the boy was thinking aloud, that he paid no attention to his surroundings, had forgotten where he was, in fact.

The words touched the colonel, and, stepping forward, he laid his hand gently upon the shoulder of the youth, and said:

"Come, tell me who you are and why you came to my camp."

The touch recalled the boy to his senses, he started, passed his hand over his eyes, and looking the colonel squarely in the face, said:

"Yes, sir; I came to tell you that your guide is leading you into a trap."

"What do you mean?"

"You passed up the trail beyond the mountain range to the stage station. Why did you return by this one?"

The question was almost imperative, but the colonel answered mildly:

"Our guide deemed it far better for the ambulances, as we have ladies along."

"Better traveling, yes, but he brought you this way to entrap you."

"Impossible!"

"If your guide is Buffalo Bill, then he did not know this country; but if he is Indian Dick, then he is a renegade white man, pretending to be a trapper and

hunter, but living among the Indians, and he is as merciless as his redskin comrades toward his own people."

"These are bold words, young man, against one who holds our lives in his hands."

"That is why I warn you that he is a renegade."

"And who and what are you?"

The question seemed to stagger the youth.

Again he passed his hand across his forehead, as though to collect his thoughts, and then said, sadly and slowly:

"I don't know who I am, but I believe I am a boy hermit, for now I am all alone."

There was something almost pathetic in the words and manner of the youth, and the colonel asked:

"Where do you live?"

The boy's manner changed quickly, and he said, abruptly:

"See here, sir; never mind me, for I'm all right, while you and your whole outfit will be massacred if you camp in this valley to-night, for hundreds of braves are in hiding a few miles from here, to follow you into Sunset Canyon when you break camp in the morning."

The words seemed to impress the colonel and all who heard them, and he asked:

"How do you know this?"

"I know it from having been told by one who knew, but who is dead, now, that Indian Dick was leading you into a trap, and looking for myself, I saw the trail of the Indians going to Sunset Canyon—call your guide and I will tell him what he dare not deny."

"The guide left camp half an hour ago, to search for Buffalo Bill, who went off on the trail of a man who fired upon me from the cliff half a mile back on the trail."

"I came by there. I saw your men, and I did not meet Indian Dick, so he has gone to the Indian camp to warn them to be ready to attack you."

"How can I find that out?"

"Send men on his trail, and you'll find that he turned, when out of sight of your camp, to the left to go beyond that range."

"Captain Walton, go with this youth, and take several men with you, to see if this is the case."

The officer addressed at once went with the youth, and several of the soldiers, and in fifteen minutes returned to the camp and reported that the trail of Indian Dick led as had been said it would by his accuser.

"Well, young man, you have warned us of danger, so have you any suggestions to make as to how we can get out of it?"

"I can guide you, as soon as night comes, around the range on the right, and over it, but you'll have to leave your wagons."

"All right; there are side saddles along for the ladies, and they all ride well."

"I will put you on the trail for the fort, beyond the Indians' ambush, and you will have to push on through the night, for they will discover your escape when Indian Dick returns to-night."

"But Buffalo Bill will have to be left to his fate."

"Better one man than many, and ladies, too; besides, from all I have heard of him, he can take care of himself."

"True, though I wish we could warn him—ah! Captain Dalton, write a note, and have one of the men tie it on the lasso near the top, and the lower end must be looped up high from the ground."

"Then return with the men waiting there, and we will leave camp at once."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOY GUIDE.

There were several officers who shook their heads at the trust that Colonel Doan was placing in one wholly unknown, one even not heard of before, or whose presence in that part of the country was not even suspected by any one, as far as could be ascertained.

But Colonel Doan had decided against his guide, Indian Dick, in favor of the youth.

Who and what the latter was he could ascertain later; but he would not neglect such a warning.

The youth had come to the camp, doubtless expecting to find Indian Dick there, but had found him gone.

Perhaps the guide would return to camp before the time for starting, and if so the colonel would have the accuser and accused together and judge between them.

"Oh! that Buffalo Bill would return!" he said to himself.

He well knew how valuable the advice of the Chief of Scouts would be under the circumstances.

When he founded the new fort known as Fort Belvue, Colonel Doan had asked for W. F. Cody as his Chief of Scouts, yet it had been a long time before he had been able to secure his services, as duties called him elsewhere.

But at last he arrived, just prior to the trip to the Overland trail to meet Mrs. Doan and those with her.

Buffalo Bill had been glad to go along to get an idea of the new country he was to serve in, from such a person as Indian Dick was reputed to be, "a hunter and trapper, who knew every trail thoroughly, as well as the haunts of the Indians."

He was said to dwell alone, to devote much time to seeking revenge upon the Sioux for wrongs he had suffered from them, and that they stood in great awe of him.

For years he had been a prisoner among them, it was said, and more than this and that he had now and then put in an appearance at the fort to sell pelts and buy supplies and ammunition from the sutler, nothing was known of him.

It was because of his knowledge of the country and that he had happened in at the fort just in time to be of service, that Colonel Doan had secured him as guide to the stage trail and back again.

He had well done his work, going by one trail and suggesting a return by another, and Buffalo Bill's great experience had shown him that the guide was a perfect plainsman.

But now, upon the word of a mere boy, Colonel Doan was asked to consider his guide a traitor, and to trust his life, and the lives of those under him, to one wholly unknown.

But the colonel had made up his mind to follow the lead of the mysterious youth, and hence an officer had been sent to leave a note for Buffalo Bill, telling why they had left, and to be on his guard against a surprise, while a large force would be sent out at once from the fort over the trail, and for him, the scout, to remain in hiding upon the cliff until the soldiers returned.

This note, with some supplies, was taken up to the tree by a soldier, who climbed the lariat and there left it.

Descending, the soldier gave the end of the lariat a swing, having tied a stone to it, so that it would not hang down over the trail and catch the eye of an Indian, and then the party set out on the return to camp.

Supper was ready, the camp fires were left burning, the ladies mounted horses,

leaving the ambulances, and the command set off, just after nightfall, under the guidance of the mysterious youth, Indian Dick not having returned.

The colonel rode ahead with the youth, who, mounted on his Pinto pony, had quietly taken the lead, and like specters the command moved out of the camp.

Believing in the young guide, Colonel Doan was yet prepared against a surprise, and had a single action of the youth indicated treachery, a bullet from the revolver of the officer would have been sent crashing through the brain of the one who had accused Indian Dick of treachery, yet asserted that he could lead the command to safety.

Whether the youth knew or suspected this, he rode on with the utmost calmness, and entering the heavy timber at the base of a mountain range, began to climb the steep trail, all riding in Indian file and wondering how he could in the intense darkness find his way.

But he never hesitated, and that he seemed to know thoroughly what he was doing, he would now and then say to the colonel:

"The trail is rough and dangerous, now, sir, for a short distance, so pass back word and have a man dismount and lead the horses of the ladies."

The colonel smiled to himself as he obeyed what was really a command from the boy, and the nature of the trail for the next half mile showed that the advice had been timely.

At last the summit of the range was reached, and the boy pointed to a distant valley where there was a glow.

"Camp fires!" said Colonel Doan.

"Yes, that is where the redskins are lying in wait."

"We have flanked them, and at the bottom of this range is the direct trail from the fort, which you left to come around, over a dozen miles, but one-fourth the distance by the trail," and the boy began the descent of the mountain.

After a ride of several miles, a slow and perilous descent in the darkness, the base of the range was reached.

The guide was now alone in the lead, the colonel following, and when they came out into the valley, the former said:

"This leads direct to the fort, forty miles distant, and—hark!"

All listened attentively, and the sound of many hoofs was heard moving rapidly, but muffled as though at a distance.

"The Indians have discovered that you eluded their trap, and, knowing you must come out here, are pushing hard for this point to head you off; but you are all well mounted, and have over a mile the start, for they are back in Sunset Canyon, so ride hard, and send a courier ahead to bring help, for they may follow you near the fort."

Colonel Doan turned to order two couriers sent on ahead at full speed, but when he looked again for the boy guide, he had disappeared like an apparition.

CHAPTER VII.

HE SAVED THEM.

The young guide had disappeared almost mysteriously.

Some had seen him ride out of the trail into the shadow while Colonel Doan was giving orders, but when looked for he could not be found.

The colonel had despatched two couriers to the fort, in case the horse of one of them should fail, with orders not to spare the spur and press on at the utmost speed.

He had sent for a force of cavalry, mounted infantry and two guns, some-

thing over two hundred men, for he hoped to be able to give the redskins a lesson, and yet he did not like to take more men from the fort, as the youth had hinted to him that a still larger band of Sioux might make an attack on the fort.

As the youth could not be found, there was not a moment to lose waiting for or searching for him, and so the colonel gave the order to form column of four, as the trail was broad enough, and thus push on at a canter, for the Indians could be heard coming rapidly, the sound of many hoof-falls echoing in the Sunset Canyon.

On went the cavalry, and they kept a steady pace until the colonel felt that the Indians must have reached the spot where they came into the trail.

Then he halted and listened, several officers with him, while the command pushed on.

The sound of the iron-shod hoofs of the troopers' horses soon died away, and then came the dull thud of the shodless ponies.

The sound ceased as the redskins drew rein at the trail down the mountain.

"They are searching for our trail."

"We will gain a few minutes by their delay, so will overtake the command," said Colonel Doan.

They had gone a quarter of a mile and drew rein to cross a stream and water their horses.

Then there came to their ears the sound of wild yells of rage.

"They have discovered that we flanked them, and are on our way to the fort; but how far ahead they do not know."

"We must ride for it, gentlemen, and our horses are fleetier than their ponies, though not as enduring."

With this the little party dashed on, and after a mile's hard ride overtook the command.

Going to the front the colonel increased the speed to a steady gallop, without saying anything to alarm the ladies.

Thus the flight continued through the night, following the broad trail mile after mile, and which had been a pathway for a hundred years or more of Indians in their wanderings.

That the redskins were gaining upon them slowly, but yet gaining, Colonel Doan well knew, and so he dropped back to the rear of the command and began to form his men for battle.

The trail was new to him, and to the others, but he felt that they must be within a dozen miles of the fort, and he intended to let the ladies push on under a small escort, while he halted to fight the Indians back until reinforcements arrived from the fort.

He was looking out as well as he could in the darkness for a good place to make a stand, when back over a level stretch of land he could see the Indians coming in a large and compact mass.

They were not more than a quarter of a mile away, and were urging their ponies to the utmost, determined to run upon their foes before they should get nearer to the fort.

That there must be half a thousand of them Colonel Doan knew, but yet he would halt his little force at the first good position and fight them.

The ladies, under an escort of an officer and ten men, were sent forward at the greatest speed their horses could go, and coming upon a rise, ragged with bowlders, and where there was a cedar thicket, Colonel Doan ordered his men to wheel into line to make a stand there.

The tired horses were quickly halted, the men threw themselves from their saddles and got their carbines and revolvers ready, sheltering themselves behind the

bowlders and among the trees, and in a minute were ready to meet their foes.

Not suspecting that a halt had been made, the Sioux reeled back under the severe fire that greeted them at short range, but, confident in numbers, rallied for a charge, when behind the soldiers came wild cheers, the sound of bugles, and the thunder of a hundred iron-shod horses in full run.

The Indians heard it, too, and they began to check their ponies to fly, for they knew that their foes had received help from the fort.

But, good riders though they were, half a thousand charging horses were not easily turned about, and the contents of the carbines of the cavalry that had come to the rescue were poured upon them with deadly effect.

The mounted infantry was also coming up at a run, and the two guns were fairly flying into position, and going into action, the bursting of shells of the artillery sent death among the now retreating redskins, a retreat that ended in a stampede.

Pursued by the cavalry, the Sioux, badly whipped, were scattering in every direction when day dawned, and Colonel Doan camped upon the field, while he said to Captain Gordon:

"And it was that boy who told me to send couriers on ahead to the fort for aid, when I would not have thought it necessary, so the fight was won through him—in fact, he has saved us."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE SEARCH FOR BUFFALO BILL.

The ladies had kept on to the fort, while Colonel Doan and his men had camped in a pleasant valley near the scene of the fight, to care for the wounded and bury the dead, pale-face and redskin alike.

A courier had been sent to the fort to report a victory, and for ambulances for the wounded, and several scouts having come out with the reinforcements, Colonel Doan felt more at ease, for with Indian Dick away and accused of being a traitor, and Buffalo Bill left behind, he had severely felt the absence of men in buckskin, so absolutely necessary to a frontier force of soldiers.

As several of the Indians had been but slightly wounded, the colonel ordered their wounds dressed, and the pursuit having been recalled, they were to go on after their comrades and bring a number of braves back with them to look after their injured comrades and their dead.

They were accordingly well mounted and started upon their mission, one of the scouts who spoke their language well having told them that Colonel Doan and his men would break camp in the afternoon to return to the fort, leaving the redskins with supplies to await the return of their comrades for them.

In scouting about with a few troopers and a scout, Lieutenant Arthur Lowery, the colonel's aide, came upon a dead horse, saddled and bridled.

At once he halted, and, turning to a sergeant, called out:

"Sergeant, do you recognize that horse?"

"It's Indian Dick's, sir."

"Yes, I was sure of it."

"See if there is anything about the saddle to further prove it is the horse of the traitor guide."

The sergeant dismounted, and with one of the men stripped the saddle and bridle from the animal, the former unfastening a blanket rolled up and fastened to the cantel of the saddle, thereby revealing an Indian chief's feather, war-bonnet and a lot of paints.

"It's Indian Dick's, sir, for I saw these Indian fixin's one night when he unrolled

his blanket, and he said he kept them with him to play redskin if he got into a tight place any time."

"I dare say he could play Indian better than he admitted; but we will take those things with us, sergeant, the whole outfit, and I'm only sorry we did not find Indian Dick instead of his dead horse."

"I think I shall ask the colonel to let me take a few more men and scout back on the trail to look up Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, sir; and I would like to go along, sir."

"You shall, sergeant."

"Me, too, loot'nent, for though this country is a leetle new ter me, it are ther same ter most of us, but I'm willin' ter learn it, and kinder feel dubious about our Chief o' Scouts, Buf'ler Bill, ther best man as ever wore buckskin," said Nugget Nat, who had come out West as a miner, struck it rich by finding a fortune in one golden nugget, but which had been the ruin of him, for he had dissipated it all away, and then became a scout, saying he never wished again to have more than a living.

A good scout he was, and a good man, too, but he had only been at Fort Belvue a few months, and had not yet, as he expressed it, "Got ther lay o' ther land down jist fine."

"All right, Nugget Nat, you are the man I want with me as scout, and we'll find Buffalo Bill, or know what has become of him," was the lieutenant's answer, and he led the way back to the camp.

Colonel Doan readily acquiesced in the request of the lieutenant to go on the search for Buffalo Bill, but ordered him to take a detachment of thirty-five men, selected from three troops, and a company of mounted infantry, another officer with him and a second scout beside Nugget Nat, and this would give him all told a force of about forty men.

As the command pulled out for the fort, the lieutenant started upon his expedition by a flank movement, not wishing to be seen by the Indians, some thirty in number, who had just returned to the scene for their dead and wounded comrades, wholly unable to understand why the pale-faces had given them up to them.

As it was nearing sunset, Nugget Nat, who was ahead of the little command, suddenly halted, and all heard the clatter of approaching hoofs, then the rapid rattle of a repeating rifle, answered by other shots, and the next moment a horseman dashed into view, pursued by half a hundred warriors.

"Buffalo Bill, by the Gods of War! and mounted upon that boy guides Pinto pony!" cried Lieutenant Lowery, as he quickly formed his men for action.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOST TRAIL.

When Buffalo Bill climbed up to the top of the cliff, by the aid of the lariat, which he had caught over the tree growing among the rocks, he had quickly looked around him to see if there was not a dead body lying somewhere about.

That the intended assassin of Colonel Doan could escape the volley of carbines turned upon him he could not believe.

He saw at once that the man had expected to remain hidden among the rocks, not supposing that any one could get up to him, but his throwing the lariat had disabused his mind of that idea and he had fled, having to take the risk of the gantlet of fire from the position he held.

But Buffalo Bill, instead of finding a dead man, beheld one very much alive and in full flight.

He had bounded down the steep slope to where his horse was staked out, and

the scout saw him just as he was mounting.

Then up went the deadly rifle. There was a quick aim as the horse bounded away, and Buffalo Bill saw that his bullet had gone true, for the man reeled in his saddle, clutched at the horn and half drew rein, and the next instant he drove his spurs deep and dashed away.

The scout could have fired again, but he was not one to hit a man when down.

The man had fired to kill the colonel, and just the result of the shot Buffalo Bill did not know.

He would have preferred for the intended assassin to have turned upon him and so have it out, but he saw that he would escape unless he brought him down, so he fired, for to try and kill Colonel Doan from ambush was deserving of death as a forfeit for his act.

"I believe he is hard hit, so I will follow him," was Buffalo Bill's comment as he walked rapidly on after the flying horseman.

He saw where the horse had been staked out, and he took notice that the animal was shod, though evidently an Indian pony.

Following the trail, Buffalo Bill kept upon it for a couple of miles or more, the while expecting to come upon the wounded man or his dead body.

At length he came to a stream and here he discovered that the man had halted, dismounted, and bent down to quench his thirst, for the bank was red with blood, and there were the prints of his hands in the soft earth.

Looking across the stream Buffalo Bill could see that the horse had not left the water there.

He had gone either up or down the stream, and this was, of course, to throw pursuit off his trail.

The scout hesitated, wondering just what to do.

If the colonel was seriously wounded, he decided, the command would push rapidly on to Fort Belvue.

Of course, his horse would be left in the canyon for him, just where his lariat was.

Perhaps some of the men would remain there to await his coming.

If too badly wounded to travel rapidly, the colonel would be put in the ambulance, and perhaps the command would go into camp not far away.

Indian Dick had said to the scout that there was no way to get upon that ridge with a horse without riding miles in one direction or the other.

So Buffalo Bill felt assured if he went back to the canyon on foot it would take some time, and to get his horse and ride around to the spot where he then was would hardly be possible before nightfall.

Then a search would have to be made for the trail, to see which way the man had gone, and this could not be done before the next day.

If he remained there and looked up the trail he would gain time, for he had heard of a hermit living in that country, whose appearance answered that of the man he had got a shot at.

If this was the hermit, he argued, his retreat could not be very far away; but, as he had never heard of his being unfriendly to the soldiers, why had he attempted to kill Colonel Doan?

Anxious to find the man, dead or alive, Buffalo Bill threw his rifle over his shoulder and started down the stream.

His eyes searched both banks as he went along to discover where the horse had left the water.

But after going a couple of miles he came to some rapids, which showed that that man had not passed them.

Nor was there a trace of his having gone ashore before reaching the rapids.

To make sure, however, Buffalo Bill retraced his steps slowly, searching as thoroughly as he went along as before.

He reached the spot he had started from, having discovered only that the wounded man must have turned up the stream.

So up the stream he went, and after several miles came to where, upon the other shore, a lava valley ran to the very edge of the water.

There the horseman must have gone ashore, and, fortunately, a fallen tree a short distance above bridged the stream, and the scout crossed.

But night came on, and Buffalo Bill was compelled to admit that no hoof could make a trail in that lava valley, and there were a dozen different directions that the fugitive might have gone in from the banks of the stream and leave no trace of his going.

"Well, I've lost the trail, that is certain."

"Now, to find my way back in the darkness is the question," he said.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING FOR HIM.

Buffalo Bill started upon the back trail tired and hungry, for he had brought no food with him, and had been too anxious to find the man he was in search of to look for game to bring down with his rifle.

He found no difficulty in going back over his trail as long as he kept to the banks of the stream.

But the darkness was intense in the timber along the banks, and he could not tell just where he had reached the water, so, rather than go astray, he determined to camp for the night.

Without food, he could only take his fill of water from the stream, and then wrap himself in his blanket and go to sleep in as good a spot as he could find.

But Buffalo Bill was one to take things as they came, good and bad, and never grumble, so he slept well and awoke at dawn.

If he had no breakfast, he consoled himself with the thought that he had not the work of collecting wood, making a fire and cooking food.

As he trudged along upon the trail of the horseman he had followed, a deer ran near him, but, hungry though he was, he would not fire, determined to wait until he reached camp, for he felt certain that some one had been left with his horse to await his return.

He walked briskly and had reached the foot of the ridge when the sun was about an hour high.

Ascending the slope toward the cliff, and feeling that he would soon join his friends, Buffalo Bill started as he suddenly saw a form before him, directly in his path, and leaning upon a rifle.

Instantly he was on his guard, for he knew not whether to expect friend or foe.

His first glance made him aware of the presence of some one, and the thought flashed through his mind that it was Indian Dick waiting for him.

No, it was not Indian Dick.

Instead, it was a mere youth in buckskin, and with a most unique cap of various-hued feathers.

This much Buffalo Bill saw, as well as noting that the person was a perfect stranger to him, and more, that his manner was not hostile.

On the contrary, it seemed that he was waiting for the scout.

He had seen Buffalo Bill first, and rose at his approach.

The scout kept on, instinctively ready for a trap should one be sprung upon him.

"You are Buffalo Bill?" said the youth, as the scout drew near.

"Yes; but just who you are I cannot guess, y' young pard," answered the scout, in a kindly way, gazing at the youth with admiration.

"I do not know myself, but that does not matter, as I am here to save you."

"From what?"

"Indians."

Buffalo Bill eyed the youth searchingly, and asked:

"Where did you come from?"

"My home."

"Where is it?"

"Never mind now about me, for you are in danger."

"Where are there any Indians?"

"Not far from here, lying in ambush in the canyon for you."

"Ah! but I expected to find friends there."

"Soldiers?"

"Yes."

"They are gone."

"Where?"

"To the fort."

"But they surely left some one with a horse for me?"

"No; they left a letter and some supplies on the cliff where your lariat is fastened to a tree, for they had to go away."

"I will go and see what the letter says. But how do you know this?"

"I knew that Indian Dick, the renegade, was your guide, and was leading you into a trap, for he had hundreds of Sioux hiding in Sunset Canyon to attack the soldiers."

"So I went to your chief and told him Indian Dick was a traitor, and I would guide him by a secret trail over the mountains, around Sunset Canyon."

"You tell me that you saw Colonel Doan?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"He was camped on ahead of here half a mile."

"Was he wounded?"

"No; for the bullet fired at him flattened on a gold badge he wore."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

"But you say Indian Dick is a renegade and treacherous?"

"Yes; he lives with the Indians, but pretends to be a trapper living alone."

"Ah, and he had set a trap for the soldiers, you say?"

"Yes."

"If this is true then my estimate of the man was correct, for I doubted him from the first, and he had an ugly look that no honest man should have."

"He is a bad man."

"Where is he now?"

"With the Sioux, I guess, for he started out from the camp to find you, he said, but I saw his trail lead in another direction, and the colonel sent an officer to see it, for he was a little afraid to trust me at first."

"But he did trust you?"

"Yes, and sent for the men waiting for you in the canyon, and I guided the soldiers by night around Sunset Canyon, and there left them, for I thought I'd better come back and save you."

Buffalo Bill regarded the youth earnestly for a moment, and then said, as he held forth his hand:

"Boy pard, put it there, for we must know each other better."

CHAPTER XI.

BUFFALO BILL PUZZLED.

The youth shook hands with the great scout, in an awkward manner, for the act was wholly new to him, though his adopted father had explained to him how much there was in a handshake.

In fact, the old hermit had taught the boy all he knew himself, had encouraged him to read, and always had bought books of various kinds in his pilgrimages to the settlements after supplies, ordering works that were a surprise to the one he ordered them of, for the man was a scholar and knew the world well from which he had exiled himself by some deed of evil.

Don, the boy hermit, therefore was strangely well informed, yet he had had no practical experience with the outside world of which he had read so much.

"So you are here to save me, eh?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me just what you wish to save me from."

"I left the soldiers last night, after guiding them to the trail."

"The Sioux would follow them, I know, but they could escape them."

"Then I came to save you, and as I turned into the timber I heard the Sioux riding hard after the soldiers, and there were a great many of them."

"They had discovered that some one had found out what they were up to, and had guided the pale-faces around the danger."

"When they passed me, I rode back to the trail I had led the soldiers, not to meet the Sioux."

"I was coming to the canyon to meet you, but I concluded to scout ahead on foot first, and it was well that I did, for I found a small band of Sioux in the pass."

"They had seen the lariat, I guess, climbed up it, and found the letter and bag of provisions, and so knew some one was coming back that way."

"That's how I thought it was, for there they were hiding in the canyon."

"I guess you've got it about right, young pard."

"I went back to my pony and rode along the ridge until I came to a break, and then turned in to come here."

"My pony is feeding down in the valley, where I hid him, and I stayed here, for they have a lookout who would see you if you went on the cliff, and signal to the others you were coming."

"About how many reds are there waiting for me?"

"I saw a dozen, but there were more, I am certain."

"Too many for us to tackle."

"We could not get near them, for they have their lookouts watching."

"It's worth a risk for me to get something to eat, for I'm as hungry as a coyote."

"I've got some meat and bread with me—it's where my pony is, and you can have it, for I'm going home as soon as I guide you to the trail to the fort, and then you'll have to be careful, for the Sioux are scattered all about."

"I will; but you are a trump to give me something to eat, so suppose we go and tackle it, for I guess you haven't had your breakfast yet."

"Yes, I ate my breakfast before day-break, when I came here to head you off, for I supposed you had gone so far you could not return at night."

"You've hit it there, boy pard, for I followed the man who so cowardly shot at Colonel Doan from an ambush, and I wish I could have come up with him."

"He was a large man, with long hair and beard, and dressed in buckskin."

"I fired at him as he mounted his horse, and hit him, but do not know how seriously he was wounded."

"Can you tell me who he is?"

"I cannot tell you," was the quiet reply.

"Well, I'll find out some day, for he is too dangerous to run at large, when he

turns his rifle from ambush upon such a noble man and splendid soldier as is Colonel Carrol Doan.

"He is some renegade white man who fears the coming of the soldiers into this country, but I'll trail him to his lair yet."

Don made no reply, but walked on to where his Pinto pony was staked out, and getting his haversack of provisions from his saddle, he handed it to the scout.

Eagerly Buffalo Bill attacked the broiled venison steak and hoe-cake, and greatly enjoyed his cold breakfast, leaving enough for another meal, which he handed back to the youth, who said:

"You keep it, for it's a long ride to the fort, and you will need it."

"I thank you, pard; but I'm good now for another twenty-four hours, and do not wish to deprive you."

"But I am going home as soon as I have put you on the trail, for from where I leave you you can ride to the fort by night."

"Well, I'll have to hoof it, pard, as I have no horse."

"I know; so won't you take mine?"

"What will you do?"

"Hoof it," was the smiling reply.

"No, I'm not a tenderfoot, so can walk; you saved me from starving, and I'll not take your horse."

"Take him, for I don't mind a run on foot."

"Why not go to the fort with me?"

"Oh, no, no! Not there!"

"Why not?"

"I'll go home."

"Where is your home?"

"It's yonder," and in the sweep of the youth's hand Buffalo Bill could not place the direction.

"Who do you live with?"

"I am all alone now," was the pathetic reply.

"Then you are a boy hermit," and Buffalo Bill was more than ever interested in the youth.

"Yes, I'm a boy hermit."

"Will you not take me to your home?"

"No, no! oh, no! You must not go there," was the quick and eager reply.

More and more impressed with the youth, Buffalo Bill questioned him further, but seeing that he seemed distressed, and gave evasive answers, he said:

"Pardon me, my young friend, but I feel a deep interest in you, and believe me, you will ever find me your friend."

"Some day I hope we will know each other better, but now I will not force myself upon you, though I wish to ask you honestly if you desire me to take your horse?"

"Yes, I do."

"What shall I do with him after reaching the fort?"

"Keep him, for I give him to you; but you must go now," and saddling his pony and lengthening the stirrups for the scout, when the latter mounted, the youth started off on foot at a swinging run that surprised the scout at its steady and rapid pace.

CHAPTER XII.

A TIMELY MEETING.

"That boy is a mystery to me, more than I can fathom," muttered Buffalo Bill, as, without any effort, Don sped along the valley at the base of the range, keeping the pony at a canter.

His rifle was slung over his shoulder, his body erect, and he ran like one who had been trained to it and was untiring.

Putting the spurs to the pony, which he found to be a splendid animal, Buffalo Bill rode close up behind the youth and called out:

"Say, pard, there is no need of your running so."

"It's as easy a gait as walking," was the reply.

"Does it not tire you, for you have come over half a mile?"

"Ah, no; I can keep this pace up for many miles."

"Then you learned that trot from the Indian runners?"

"Yes."

"I cannot feel comfortable riding your horse and you running along on foot."

"Oh, don't mind me, for I'm all right," came Don's usual answer.

"Yes, you appear to be; but how far is it to the place where you leave me?"

"About three miles, for there is a break in the range there."

"Let me at least carry your rifle."

"No; it is not heavy."

Buffalo Bill said not more.

He saw that the youth was running swiftly along without an effort, and he felt that he was anxious to get him to the place where he would part company with him.

So he kept the Pinto at a canter until the boy halted where there was a narrow canyon penetrating the ridge.

If he breathed more rapidly, if his run told on him, it was not evident to the scout, who regarded him now with admiration, and said:

"Well, boy pard, you beat 'em all, for I don't know just where to find your match."

Don smiled, as though the words of praise from a man like Buffalo Bill pleased him, and replied:

"Here is the canyon, and when you pass through it you will come out into the big valley through which the Indian trail runs, and which will lead you to the fort, but I'll go up on the ridge and signal you if all is clear through the pass, for Sioux may be hanging about."

"It is something new to have some one looking to my safety, for it's my business to take care of other people; but I confess I do not know this country, having only come to Fort Belvue a week ago."

"Some day I'll square the debt of gratitude I owe you, boy pard."

"No; let it be as it is."

"I'll go to yonder high point and wave my hand if it is all right, and if not I'll come back and guide you to another pass half a dozen miles further on."

"Good-by," and Buffalo Bill again held out his hand, which this time was grasped firmly in return.

Going up the steep hill with apparently no effort, the youth approached the point he had referred to cautiously, and after a moment waved his hand.

As he did so, he moved his position, disappearing from sight, and Buffalo Bill rode on into the pass.

The other end of the canyon ended in abrupt cliffs, and Buffalo Bill was almost under their shadow when he suddenly saw a puff of smoke shoot out from the heights above, a report followed, and an Indian brave leaped to his feet from behind a rock not a hundred feet in front of the scout, but dropped dead as he was bounding away.

Instantly Buffalo Bill was on the alert, but from the cliffs he heard the words:

"My shot will warn them, so dash out into the valley and run for it."

"He was the sentinel of the band."

"And leave you?" cried the scout, reproachfully.

"They will know nothing of me, thinking you killed him. I'm all right, so go."

Buffalo Bill did not half like the idea of leaving the brave youth, but he realized the truth of what he said, and felt that he was amply able to take care of himself, so he dashed forward to the mouth of the canyon.

Whatever his intention had been, he had to quickly make up his mind to act.

There lay the dead brave, his rifle by his side and cocked, showing that he must have had his aim upon the scout when the youth discovered him from the cliffs above and fired the fatal shot.

But then, too, coming up the valley at a run, was a string of red horsemen, alarmed by the shot, and evidently just coming out of a camp a short distance off.

Buffalo Bill was within range of his rifle he knew, but he did not fire.

The way to the fort was open to him to escape, for the Sioux came from the other direction.

He glanced up at the ridge, fearful that the youth would fire upon the redskins advancing.

But he had disappeared.

So away he went at a run on the trail toward the fort, and as he looked back he saw that the red pursuers were increasing in number.

Urging his pony to better speed, he discovered that there were some fleet animals ridden by the Indians, and as several seemed gaining, after a run of over an hour, he brought his repeating-rifle to bear and fired.

A moment after he dashed upon the command of Lieutenant Arthur Lowery on the search for him.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEATEN BACK.

It was a relief to Buffalo Bill to see the troopers, for he was already looking about for a place where he could stand at bay if the redskins drew still nearer to him.

The pony he rode was a good one, and fleet, too, but he had already been hard pressed in the rides of his young master, and the scout's weight was so much greater that it told upon him.

But the sight of the troopers changed the aspect of affairs greatly, for Lieutenant Lowery at once formed his men in line of battle and they advanced with carbines ready to fire, and to follow a volley with a charge with revolvers and sabers.

The redskins took in at a glance the situation, that though they might outnumber the soldiers, they were no match for them, so they halted to at least make a show of resistance, while Buffalo Bill called out:

"There are not over fifty of them, sir, and a volley will stampede them."

As there was now no danger of hitting the scout, Lieutenant Lowery ordered a halt for steady aim, and the carbines began to crack all along the line, with a result that several warriors fell from their saddles and as many ponies also went down.

"Charge!" shouted the lieutenant, as Buffalo Bill wheeled by his side, and the troopers were off with a cheer.

Still the Indians made a show of resistance to get their dead and wounded, and a shower of arrows and bullets met the soldiers, hitting a fatal blow here and there.

But the rush of the cavalry was irresistible, and the Sioux fell back, at first slowly, then rapidly, and as the troopers were upon them, revolver in one hand, saber in the other, it became a perfect stampede.

For half a mile they were pursued, until every individual brave seemed to have scattered in a different direction, and then the recall was sounded by the bugler, and the victorious men rode back to go into camp and look after the dead and wounded.

A good camp ground was found in some timber, where there was a small lake, and the men were busy looking after their wounded comrades, some half a dozen in number, and their dead, for three troopers had been killed outright.

But the loss to the redskins was very

heavy, no wounded, but over a score of dead.

"Well, lieutenant, I brought you a fight!" said Buffalo Bill, as he joined Lieutenant Lowery in his camp after the battle.

"Yes, Bill, and a good one, for we gave them a severe blow, though we can but regret our own loss—still they met a soldier's fate and so we must look at it."

"You know we were searching for you?"

"Searching for me, sir?"

"Yes; for all were anxious to know what had become of you, after we saw you fire at the intended assassin of Colonel Doan on the cliff."

"To quote from a boy pard of mine, sir, I will say, 'Oh! I was all right!'" said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"That we did not know, and after the battle the colonel readily granted me leave to bring a force in search of you."

"Then you had a battle, sir?"

"Oh, yes, for the redskins, five hundred strong, pursued us and brought us to bay just as reinforcements came up from the fort, and we gained a great victory."

"Colonel Doan was not badly hurt, then?"

"A mere bruise, but it was the closest call of his life."

"It would have been bad enough had he been killed, but terrible, indeed, if he had fallen before the eyes of his wife and daughter."

"I am so glad it was no worse, sir, for that shot was well aimed."

"And the assassin, Cody?"

"I lost him, sir."

"Does that mean that you killed him?"

"Oh, no, sir; but I wounded him, tracked him for miles, and then lost his trail in a lava valley."

"Too bad."

"Yes, sir; but you were warned of danger by a boy?"

"Ah! you know that; but you must, as you are riding his pony."

"He saved me, yes, twice, I may say, and merely told me he had told Colonel Doan of an ambush prepared for him, that Indian Dick was a traitor guide leading him into it, and that he guided him around the Indians in hiding."

"He did, indeed; but, Cody, who is that boy?"

"It was just the question I was going to ask you, sir."

"You met him?"

"Yes, sir; I'll tell you about it," and Buffalo Bill did so.

Then the lieutenant told of the youth's coming to their camp, his charge against Indian Dick, how they had been guided around the ambush by the young unknown, and then of the pursuit and battle that followed.

Buffalo Bill listened with deepest attention to all Lieutenant Lowery said, and then remarked:

"You left the ambulances in the camp, sir, so they must be there yet."

"Yes, and we brought extra horses along to take them back with us, if the Indians had not burned them, for the baggage of the ladies we cached."

"We can go on to that camp, sir, if you will, and the ambulances will be just what we want for our wounded, so can be sent on to the fort under a small escort, for I am going to ask you to do me a favor, Lieutenant Lowery," said the scout, earnestly.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFFALO BILL'S RESOLVE.

"Certainly, Cody, with great pleasure, so say what it is you wish me to do," answered Lieutenant Lowery, in response to what the scout had said.

"It is nearly sunset now, sir, but I can go on ahead rapidly with a few men to the camp, where you left the ambulances, and send them back here, so the wounded can start early in the morning for the fort."

"Yes."

"If you come on then to the camp near the canyon, we will be between the wounded here and the redskins, and it will be a good base to operate from."

"Yes, and it is a good camp for defense, while grass, wood and water are plentiful about it."

"But you deem it best we should hold it for a few days, to keep our eyes on the redskins, I see, and I will so send word to Colonel Doan."

"Yes, sir, that, in fact, was my idea, but I thought while you were in camp there, and making short scouts about, I would like to go off on a long trail."

"Ah! after the man who fired on the colonel?"

"Yes, sir, partly; but also after that boy."

"I see."

"He knows who the man was, I feel sure, who fired at the colonel, and then, too, I wish to find out who and what he is."

"By all means, if you can, for he is a blank mystery to all of us, from the colonel down."

"And to me, sir; but why not fathom him?"

"True."

"He served the command well, sir, and he saved me, too, and he accused Indian Dick of being a traitor, a renegade; but who is he?"

"I give it up, Cody."

"If he is allied with bad white men dwelling in these mountains, and I half believe that he is, why, we must find it out and take the noble young fellow out of such company."

"It is just what should be done, if we can."

"Now, lieutenant, that young fellow talks like a book, he has no dialect, no slang, and speaks like a man in years, and one of education and refinement, yet he must have been a long time in this wild land to know it as he does, and know the Indians also so well."

"He says he is a boy hermit, but are there not others who are near him, and what is the influence that he is under?"

"I have heard there were white men dwelling in this country, allying themselves with the Indians, while they hunt for gold, and it would be to their interest to keep the soldiers and settlers away, and to do this, they would war with the Sioux against their own people."

"You are right."

"Now, it was a white man, sir, who fired upon the colonel, and Indian Dick, who claimed to be a lone trapper and hunter, proved to be a traitor, so he must be in league with that intended assassin."

"Yes, but do you suspect that boy can be of that gang?"

"I fear so, sir, but that his nature revolts at their crimes, and he does what good he can to counteract their evil deeds."

"What else can he be, sir, though I may be mistaken?"

"You do not generally get far off the trail, Cody, and I begin to see the situation as you do, and would like, above all things, to run that boy to his lair and rescue him from those he is with, if they are such as you think; but he boldly charged Indian Dick with treachery, and that proves they cannot be friendly."

"It does, sir; but if he wished to cut loose from men of that stripe, why did he still hide his identity, refuse to speak of himself, or return with me to the fort?"

"That is more than I can answer, Bill."

"Well, sir, it is my wish to find out, and to-morrow morning I will leave the camp at dawn to track him to his abiding-place."

"But he is afoot, Cody, and it will be a trail to follow that will puzzle even you."

Buffalo Bill smiled and replied:

"Lieutenant Lowery, I was compelled by circumstances to desert that youth in what seemed close quarters for him."

"But I saw that he had too much wisdom to betray his presence by firing on the Indians, so let them all go off in pursuit of me."

"They therefore supposed that I had killed their sentinel in the canyon, and the youth, being on foot, they will not find his trail, but follow the tracks of the pony."

"Yes."

"Now I have an excuse for going back to see after my boy hermit to find out if he escaped all right."

"Yes; but where will you go, Cody?"

"I will go to the canyon, sir, where I left him, and will go supplied with several day's provisions, for I may be detained, sir, in my search, and, if so, you must not remain in camp on my account, sir."

"I'll remain, Cody, if I have to send to the fort after a month's rations."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But it will be like looking for a needle in a haystack, to search for that boy's foot-trail in these mountains."

Again Buffalo Bill smiled and replied:

"You forget, sir, that I shall ride his pony."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

The dead soldiers were buried with military honors, the warriors slain were decently placed in their graves, and Lieutenant Lowery had the wounded cared for with all the skill that kind and willing hands could bestow upon them.

Buffalo Bill had gone on with the junior lieutenant, Frank Nesmith, and half the men, to establish the camp at which Colonel Doan had been joined by the Boy Hermit, and to find the ambulances and baggage which had been hidden away.

They found the two ambulances just as they had been left, and the baggage also, with several pack-saddles of supplies also hidden by the soldiers, as it would be a hard climb for pack-animals, the youth had told them, by the trail over the mountain.

The horses brought along were hitched to the ambulances, which at once started for the camp, where the wounded were, while Lieutenant Nesmith got all in readiness for the rest of the command when it should arrive in the morning, for Lieutenant Lowery had decided to remain where he was all night.

When he had started the wounded for the fort he would come on to the advance camp in the morning.

Buffalo Bill's own horse had been brought to him, so he had mounted him, to spare the Boy Hermit's pony all that he could, and had cared for him well upon reaching camp.

Hungry and tired, the scout had his supper, and then sought his blanket for the night.

He was up with the dawn, had breakfast, and putting his saddle upon the Pinto pony, took his own horse in lead and was ready to start upon his lone trail.

He had carried ample supplies along, and Lieutenant Nesmith said, as he rode away:

"You will find us awaiting you here, Cody, if you return in three days, but if you delay longer we will be on your trail searching for you, so mark it well."

"Yas, chief, jist leave a hint which way

yer goes when trails grow dim, so as we kin track yer, ter bury yer decent if yer has been kilt, and avenge yer, or ter take keer o' yer if yer is in distress and needs our aid," called out Nugget Nat.

With a salute to Lieutenant Nesmith and a wave of the hand to the scout and the men, Buffalo Bill rode out of camp, allowing the pony he bestrode to take his own way from the very start.

He had not gone far before he came to the cliff which had so nearly been the scene of a tragedy, and which he had climbed by means of his lariat.

There were no Indians there then, but the lasso hung tied up, just within reach of his hand, and Buffalo Bill decided to get it, and what had been left for him.

He had another lasso with him, and this he coiled about his waist and began to climb.

Reaching the shelf upon which the tree grew, he found the note and bag of food just where it had been placed, and where he could not have failed finding them had he returned in the night.

Taking the lasso, he had brought with him, he tied the two together and let the other ends fall to the canyon below.

That the Indians had been there he did not doubt, but they had left all intact, expecting he would return and fall into their clutches.

Catching hold of the two lariats, Buffalo Bill slid down to the canyon, and then pulled on one until the other was drawn over the limb of the tree.

Mounting again, he allowed the pony to take his own way.

That the pony was not going home by the canyon out of which Buffalo Bill had ridden guided by the boy he well knew, but he was moving along as though he knew just where he was going, so he was given free rein.

Passing out of the canyon into a valley, the pony still followed along at the base of the cliffs, which yet presented an unbroken wall to the gaze of the scout.

Feeling, after the large battle, and their fight with Lieutenant Lowery, that the Indians would retreat rapidly to their villages, Buffalo Bill had no fear of meeting them in force, though he was constantly on the lookout for some straggler, perhaps two or more together, and avoided every rock and thicket that would serve as a good place of ambush for them.

He was glad to observe also that no matter how he turned his pony out to clear a boulder or thick underbrush, he invariably went back in the direction he had first started.

At length he came to a break in the solid wall of rock, and the pony turned into it without hesitation.

There was a dim trail there, and this the pony followed, crossing the range, going through the valley beyond, and at last, to the surprise and delight of the scout, halting on the banks of the stream just where he had lost the trail of the intended assassin of Colonel Doan.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOUND.

"This looks to me as though the man who fired at Colonel Doan and my Boy Hermit took the same trail to get home," said Buffalo Bill, as the Pinto pony stopped at the edge of the stream.

Giving him his rein, the scout allowed the pony to drink, his own horse in lead quietly seeming to wonder why he was not ridden by his master.

As soon as the horses had finished drinking Buffalo Bill urged the pony on, without touching the reins, and he smiled grimly as the animal turned up the stream.

The creek averaged in depth from knee

deep to the saddle cinch, but the horses did not mind it, the pony seeming to know the bed of the stream well, for he steered clear of the holes here and there to be found.

At last they came near the spot where the lava valley formed one bank of the creek for nearly half a mile, and Buffalo Bill was anxious to see if the pony would turn out there.

He did without hesitation, and made an easy landing, in spite of the flinty nature of the bank on that side.

Still allowing his reins to hang loose on the saddle horn, Buffalo Bill saw that the pony kept straight across the rugged valley, straight as the bird flies.

He was heading for a distant cliff, some two miles distant.

"It would take a small army to surround this valley and find where the trail leaves it, if it could be done then," muttered the scout.

When the head of the valley was reached there were seen two volcanic mountains, one on either side, and between them there led a canyon.

Riding into the canyon the scout saw that the nature of the country was changing, the lava had not flowed in the direction he was going, but toward the stream, simply inundating centuries ago the once beautiful valley, and leaving it barren flint.

Beyond the two solferino-hued mountains the country again was beautiful, with vales and hills covered with grass and timber, and traced by streams of purest water.

As the scout passed into the narrow canyon he saw a bush move upon the side of the mountain.

He knew that no bush grew there in that rock, and without appearing to notice it he kept his eye upon it.

It was a pine bush, about four feet in height, and very thick with foliage, while it appeared to grow out of the lava, some eighty feet from where the trail ran which he would follow, or rather the direction the pony was taking, for there was no trail.

"Yes, that bush hides a man, either Indian or white, and he is there to get a shot at me; but I'll surprise him a little bit.

"I don't wish to kill him until he shows his hand, but I'll see if I cannot make him show it."

As though his saddle cinch needed tightening, the scout halted, got off on the opposite side to the bush he was sure did not grow where he saw it, and which he felt confident he had seen move, and without apparent reason, for there was no wind blowing.

The bush was about a hundred and fifty yards from where he had halted, within easy range for his splendid repeating rifle.

Suddenly he threw his rifle over his saddle, and, pulling trigger, sent a bullet within a foot of the bush, for he would not fire into it until he was sure what it concealed.

There was a sudden swaying of the little pine, it fell over and an Indian sprang to his feet with a yell, and, throwing a rifle to his shoulder, pulled trigger.

The bullet was well aimed, for it cut through the rolled blanket fastened to the cantel of the scout's saddle.

But again Buffalo Bill fired, and the Indian dropped dead.

Walking up to him, but prepared for him should he be "playing possum," Buffalo Bill saw that he wore the war-bonnet of a young chief, and was dressed in a way that showed he was a redskin dandy.

"He saw me coming across the lava

valley and waited for me; but bushes don't grow in lava, and seeing that one there I was sure it meant trouble.

"He has a pony near, sure, so I'll look him up, and I trust I won't find any of his comrades near.

"I can't bury him here, so will carry him to where I can."

With this the scout led his horse up to the dead Indian, and with his lariats strapped the body upon his own horse.

Mounting once more he gave the pony free rein as before, and soon passed into the canyon, which presently opened into a large and fertile valley.

Out there was a handsome pony staked out, showing that the young chief had been upon some expedition alone, had seen the scout coming afar off, and so had plotted to kill him.

But the experienced eye of the great plainsman had at once detected the plot by knowing that no bush would grow where that one was.

Seeing a spot where the ground was broken by gullies, Buffalo Bill put the body of the Indian in one, threw dirt upon it, and then covered it with rocks to keep the coyotes from digging it up.

This done, with the pony of the young chief, he again rode on.

Once more the pony of the Boy Hermit took his own way, passed up the valley, and at its head it maneuvered into a canyon, passing between lofty cliffs.

Through this the pony passed, and then the scout discovered for the first time trails centering at the entrance to the canyon.

Once through the rocky gateway the canyon widened into quite a valley, and still further on there was another narrow pass between overhanging rocks.

Here was a barrier of logs, from cliff to cliff, some heavy bars to let down, and a fertile little vale beyond, where half a dozen ponies were feeding.

At the head of the canyon Buffalo Bill saw a stoutly built cabin.

The Pinto pony had led the scout to his home—he had found the boy hermit's abiding place.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

The Boy Hermit had watched the flight of Buffalo Bill when he dashed out of the canyon before the half-a-hundred redskins with deepest interest.

In going to the cliff overlooking the valley he had spied down in the canyon the redskin sentinel, prepared to fire on the scout when he should come nearer, but the youth had blocked his little game by a bullet, thus saving the life of Buffalo Bill.

Knowing that he would not be suspected as being upon the cliff, if he was not seen, he waited until he saw the scout well in advance of the pursuing braves, the pony running well, and then he hastily began to retrace his way.

He went along at a trot rather than a walk, and kept in a certain direction until it brought him out at the fallen tree that spanned the stream, just where the lava valley began.

Crossing on the tree he kept up the same untiring pace across the lava valley, passed between the volcanic mountains as Buffalo Bill afterward did, and in half an hour more leaped the bars that were the entrance to the little vale in which stood his home.

There was his cabin, just as he had left it, the door locked with a padlock outside.

He opened it quietly, hesitated an instant before he crossed the threshold, and then entered.

There lay the form of the dead hermit

as he had left it, a blanket drawn over it. Drawing this aside the youth gazed with tear-dimmed eyes upon the stern face of the dead.

Whatever he had been to others, what his life might have been, to him he had ever been as true as steel, a kind and loving father, and he was all the youth had ever known whom he could love, as far as his memory went back clearly, for he recalled but dimly, like a half-forgotten dream, the remembrance of his parents.

Cooking something to eat, the youth then took a pick and shovel and went up the canyon to a picturesque spot on the banks of a little brook, and began to dig a grave.

Night fell just as he finished it, and, returning to the cabin he ate a cold supper and threw himself down upon his rude cot to sleep, with no dread of the dead form lying near him.

At dawn he was awake, had his breakfast, and then began to tenderly wrap the dead form securely in blankets, fastening them with a lariat.

He took a last look at the dead face, then folded the blankets over it, and was about to raise it in his arms to bear to the grave, when he heard a neigh from one of his ponies, that always gave such an alarm of danger.

Going to the door, rifle in hand, the youth saw a man coming on foot up the little valley.

He carried a rifle across his shoulder, was dressed in buckskin, and at a glance the Boy Hermit knew him, for he muttered:

"It is Indian Dick!"

Closing the door behind him, the youth walked to a rock some fifty feet from the cabin and sat down to await the approach of the man.

"Ho, young pard, how be yer, and how is ther old man?" called out Indian Dick as he drew near.

"Sh—, Indian Dick, my father is asleep and I do not wish him disturbed, for he was wounded."

"Yas, that devil, Buffaio Bill, did it, cuss him; but I hopes it wasn't bad."

"He suffers no pain, now."

"Where is he?"

"In the cabin."

"I'll see him."

"No you won't, for no one shall disturb him; but you say that Buffalo Bill shot him."

"Yas, he's ther Chief o' Scouts over at Belvue, and is gwine ter give us trouble."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I has been to ther fort."

"What did you go there for?"

"I got big money to guide ther colonel over to ther stage trail and back ag'in."

"How do you know that Buffalo Bill shot my father?"

"Waal, as we was on the way back ye'r father shot at ther colonel, but didn't kill him, though it were a close call."

"I saw ther hermit when he ran after ther shot, and Buf'ler Bill, he threw a lariat up to a tree on ther cliff, clum' up and got a shot at ye'r father."

"Then ther command went on to ther fort, but ther Sioux jumped 'em, my horse was kilt, and I had ter hide among ther rocks and lay low, and now I've come ter git a pony from you ter go on with."

"You can have the gray; but did the Indians kill the soldiers?"

"No, durn 'em, they didn't, and it were because thet Buf'ler Bill are playin' sharp, for he claimed he didn't know this country, when he did, for arter he had shot ye'r father, he come back ter camp, found out in some way ther reds was layin' fer 'em in Sunset Canyon, and guided them by night around the tran-

they sent on arter more soldiers, and I jist tell yer, boy, ther Sioux got it hot and hard, and I barely got away."

"I thought you were with the soldiers?"

"So I were; but I had planned ther trap, and I left camp ter spring it on 'em, but it all went wrong, so I is afoot, hungry and mad clean through, for ther would hev' been a big haul fer my redskins, you bet; but I guess I'll hev' a talk with ther old man."

"You will not, Indian Dick," was the firm response of the youth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SILENT WITNESS.

There was something in the words of the youth, and his way of uttering them, that told the renegade white man that he meant just what he said, so he growled forth:

"Waal, yer needn't git mad about it, kid, for I doesn't want ter go whar' I is not welcome."

"I told you, Indian Dick, that my father was asleep, and I would not have him disturbed."

"You want a horse, you say, so I will let you have one, and I will give you what food you need, but you shall not enter that cabin, and I mean it."

"All right, kid, what you say goes, I guess, as I'm at your home, so trot out ther grub and let me hev' ther critter and I'll git; but recommember me ter ther old man, who is my pard, if you hain't."

"You and I never were friends, Indian Dick, for you were never kind to me when I was in the Indian village, and the Sioux I hate."

"Stay here and I'll bring you the food, and I'll lend you an extra saddle and bridle we have, so keep them and the pony too."

The man growled out something which Don did not hear, but remained where he had been told to wait, while he saw the youth tiptoe into the cabin and soon come out with a bag of provisions.

"Is ther old man awake?"

"No."

"I were in hopes he were, as I wants ter see him and hev' a talk with him about a plot I has ter git rid o' ther soldiers in this country, fer they kin be run inter traps, one and all of 'em, if we goes about it right."

"All right; tell me your plans, and as soon as I can I'll come up to the village for you to return here with me and talk it over; but you know I'll have to slip in as a redskin, as I never go there, so don't be surprised to see me any night."

"I won't, and I hope you'll come as soon as ther old man kin sit up, for he's ther one ter coax ther soldiers inter a trap, and you kin do your share, too."

"When yer comes yer shall know jist what my plans is, and you bet we'll stop 'em from puttin' any more forts in this country."

"Well, we'll talk it all over when I come for you; but now I have to seem unkind to you, though I guess you understand it, Indian Dick."

"You bet I does, and I guesses you is right."

"Waal, give my good wishes ter ther old man, and I'll look out fer you afore long, for you kin play Injun fu'st class and sneak in ter my tepee and no redskin suspect yer."

With this Indian Dick followed the youth, who was carrying a bridle and saddle, to the valley, and the gray pony, a very good animal, was quickly roped and gotten ready.

"So-long, boy pard, until we meets ag'in," and the renegade mounted and rode away, while Don returned to the cabin.

But the moment the renegade disappeared down the valley, Don went to the side of the cliff, over which hung a ladder made of rawhide.

Quickly he ascended to the cliff, two hundred feet above, and running along a ridge came to a high point which commanded a view of the large valley beyond.

Then he saw the renegade riding along at a canter, and following a trail that led to the mountains where the Sioux had their villages.

"He has gone; but I have suspected he would hang about to return after a while with some excuse, hoping to see my father."

"I could have captured him, but I can wait; but it will never do to let him carry out his plot, so I guess I'll go and have a talk with Buffalo Bill about it in a day or two."

Seeing that the renegade was now miles away on his trail, Don returned along the ridge, descended the rawhide ladder, and entered the cabin, anxious now to bury the body of the hermit as soon as possible.

Taking the blanket-enveloped form in his arms he carried it from the cabin, and, placing it upon a rude wagon, the wheels sawed out of logs, and which he used for hauling wood for the fires, he drew it up to the spot where he had dug the grave the day before.

Springing down into the grave, he gently placed the body there, put some pine boughs over it, and, taking from his pocket a well-worn prayer-book, which had belonged to the hermit, he began to read in a low, impressive voice the service for the dead, all unmindful that a tall form had approached silently and unseen, and was standing within thirty feet of him, looking on at the strange, weird scene with intense interest.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOUBLE SURPRISE.

Buffalo Bill left the little Pinto pony and the other animals in the pastureland before the cabin, and, rifle in hand, ascended the trail to the ledge that overhung the stream, crossing the latter on a rustic bridge made of wild grapevines.

The door of the cabin was open, and a call was not answered.

Looking in, the scout saw no one, and he began to glance quietly about him.

He saw that the ledge sloped back to the head of the canyon, where the stream entered over a fall, the sound of which came to his ears.

There was plenty of timber there, and the whole scene was a picturesque and pretty one.

The rawhide ladder leading to the top of the overhanging cliff caught the eye of the scout, as did all else about the cabin, a little vegetable garden, a number of chickens, a shelter for the horses in rough weather, and other surroundings that went to make up a very comfortable home indeed for the depths of that wilderness.

But where were the occupants?

"They cannot be far away, for the two beds I saw in the cabin, the saddles and other things prove there are several persons dwelling here," muttered the scout.

Then he continued his search, until presently his eye caught sight of a form passing through the timber with an armful of pine bushes.

"It is my Boy Hermit," cried Buffalo Bill, and he started toward the timber.

As he drew near the roar of the waterfall increased, and keeping his eye upon the boy, he saw him halt by the side of an open grave.

He was so wrapped up in his work that he did not see the scout, who watched

him break the boughs and toss them into the grave.

Buffalo Bill had now approached quite near to him, still unseen.

He saw him take a small book from the pocket of his buckskin hunting-shirt, stand at the head of the grave, and, taking off his feather cap, drop it upon the ground.

The scout respectfully removed his sombrero, and, unwilling to break in upon the youth at such a time, he stood in silence observing him.

He heard the voice of the boy as he read the service of the dead, saw him stoop and, gathering up a handful of dirt, throw it upon the body in the grave as he uttered the solemn words:

"Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

The scout noticed the quivering of the voice that told of deep feeling, and only when the last words were uttered did he step forward, saying quietly:

"Permit me to help you, my boy pard."

The youth had placed his rifle against a tree and hung his belt of arms upon it, so that he could work the more readily.

The tall form of the scout was between him and his weapons, as he half sprang toward them.

But he halted as he recognized who it was that had spoken to him.

His face had at first paled, but then flushed, and he stood undecided, as though hardly knowing what to do.

Then he said, as the scout's eyes beamed kindly upon him:

"You have tracked me here?"

"No; I had no need to."

"What do you mean?"

"But for you that Indian in ambush would have killed me, and when I fled I left you in danger, and it worried me greatly that I had to do so."

"As I was flying before the Sioux I came upon a troop of soldiers coming to search for me, and under the command of a gallant young officer, who quickly gave the Indians a good whipping."

"Then he was willing to come on to the camp where you went to warn Colonel Doan, and remain there while I came to look you up."

"But how did you track me here?"

"I left it to your pony, and he brought me here."

"Bad Pinto."

"No; on the contrary, good Pinto."

"On the way I was ambushed by a young chief, whom I turned the tables on, and after burying him I came on to your retreat."

"As I came into the little valley I saw a fresh trail leading out to the right, and feared I might miss you, but looking about, I saw you here, and so came and waited while you read the service over the one in that grave."

"Do you know who lies in that grave?" quickly asked the youth.

"I do not."

"My father."

"Ah! you have my sympathy, my poor boy."

"He was not my own father, for my parents were massacred by the Sioux years ago, when I was a very little fellow; but he bought me from the chief and made me a son by adoption, and he was always very good to me, and taught me all I know."

"I am sorry that he is dead, boy pard; but you must let me take his place, for I will be your friend now."

"Oh! will you?" and the face of the youth brightened, but quickly changed to a look of sadness again as he asked:

"Do you know who killed my father?"

"No, I do not."

"An Indian, perhaps."

"No."

"Some renegade pale-face, then?"

"No."

"Who then killed your father, boy pard?" asked Buffalo Bill, with increased interest.

"You did."

Buffalo Bill's nerves were of iron, but they gave a sudden twitch at the words of the youth and his face changed color for an instant.

But he quickly recovered himself, and said:

"Do you mean to say that I killed your father?"

"Yes."

"When and where?"

"Have you fired at no one lately?"

"Yes, an Indian chief, as I told you."

"No one else?"

"Ah! could it be the man who ambushed Colonel Doan and tried to kill him, for I fired at him from long range, and wounded him, I know; but he could not have been your father?"

"Yes; the wound you gave him was fatal—he lies in his grave now," was the sad response.

CHAPTER XX.

FORGIVEN.

Buffalo Bill bit his lips to suppress his feelings at the reply of the youth.

The situation to him was a most painful and novel one indeed.

Who was the man who had fired upon Colonel Doan.

His act would indicate that he was an outcast and a renegade.

If the latter, why did he dwell there in that little home and not among the redskins.

But the scout recalled that the youth had said his parents had been massacred by the Sioux, and he, taken prisoner, had been bought from the chief by the man who was called by the boy father.

This proved that the man must be an ally of the redskins, yet had some good in him to have purchased the boy from the chief.

His shot, then, had proved fatal, and the youth, returning to his home from his act of nobleness in saving the command from ambush, and his life, had found his adopted father dead or dying.

But how could the youth have known that he had fired the fatal shot, unless he had heard it from his adopted father, or when he was with the soldiers?

These thoughts flashed painfully through the mind of Buffalo Bill as he stood before the boy, hardly knowing what to say.

But he was no man to back down when he knew he was in the right, and after a slight hesitation said:

"If it was your adopted father who fired upon Colonel Doan from ambush, then it was I who gave him the wound that proved fatal, for he made himself the foe of his own race by his murderous act, and as such I regarded him, though I am sorry that it raises a barrier between our friendship, boy pard."

"It does not."

"Ah! you are willing to justify my act, then?"

"My father told me that you had shot him, for he recognized you, and he said that you did only your duty."

"He said this?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Two days ago."

"You had a talk with him, then, after I wounded him?"

"Yes; he was barely able to get home, but lived several hours afterward, and told of his deed."

"Did he tell you why he attempted to kill Colonel Doan?"

"Yes; he said that Colonel Doan held a secret of his that made him an outcast, and if he killed him, then he could return to the East."

"Then there was a reason for his shot, for he must have recognized the colonel, and so did not fire upon him simply as a renegade who hated him as the commander of the fort here?"

"No; he did recognize him, and wanted him out of the way."

"What was your adopted father's name?"

"I do not know."

"Or, knowing, will not tell?"

"No, I never heard it from his lips."

"How old are you?"

"I am not sure, but I think seventeen."

"Where did you learn to speak as you do, and all that you know?"

"My father taught me, for he used to tell me so much of people and our country, and all about the world, and I've got lots of books he got for me."

"But you have never been far away from here?"

"I know the country all about here for a hundred miles, and the Indian country, and beyond Fort Belvue and at the settlement, but that is all, for I do not remember well my home, though it comes back to me like dreams do, of my parents, for the Sioux taught me to forget as well as they could, you know; but they could not wipe out of my brain the night they attacked our wagon train and killed my parents and many others—no, I remember that as though it was to-day, but nothing beyond it, though I was eight years old then."

"My poor boy, you have indeed been a sufferer, and must sincerely hate the Sioux."

"I do, and they hate me, and have tried to kill me since I shot Chief Iron-Hand, who came here to buy me from my father."

"Would your father have sold you to him?"

"No, indeed; but he was away when the chief came, and he tried to force me to go with him, but I killed him."

"You did right."

"Father said so; but he went to the village and had to pay a great deal in weapons and ammunition, blankets and beads, to keep the Sioux from killing me; but they hated me, and have sent several young braves to catch or kill me."

"But they did not do so?"

"Oh, no, it was the other way; but I never let the Sioux know what had become of the braves, though I don't mind telling you."

"That is right, for the Sioux are my foes, too, and they got a very severe thrashing by Colonel Doan and again by Lieutenant Lowery, and that is not all, for they'll get many more, and your parents will be avenged, my brave boy pard; but tell me, are there not a number of white renegades in their village?"

"I don't go there now, you know, so cannot say, but there are two that I know of—Thunder Voice, the big medicine chief, and Indian Dick, who is also a chief."

"Yes, and we want both of those men."

"And I'll tell you how we can catch Indian Dick, for he is the man that led the Sioux when they massacred my parents," was the eager response of the youth.

CHAPTER XXI.

A QUEST OF THE BOY HERMIT.

Buffalo Bill was becoming more and more impressed with the Boy Hermit, and his interest in him increased with each word he uttered.

Of one thing he seemed assured, and that was of the boy's honesty.

Whatever the man he called father

might have been to the Indians, there was no doubt but that Don hated them, and was glad to live apart from them.

He could understand now how the youth had known that Indian Dick was treacherous, and had boldly gone to the camp to denounce him as a traitor, but found him gone.

Now, instead of feeling any malice toward the scout for having fired the fatal bullet that ended the life of the only one who had ever been kind to him, he accepted him as his friend, and said plainly that the man himself had said he did but his duty in firing upon him.

That the boy knew more than he told Buffalo Bill did not believe, so he thought that perhaps Colonel Doan would readily recall who his enemy was, that had met him in the Wild West, and tried to end his life.

"Well, boy pard, you must tell me your name, so I will know what to call you," he said.

"My name is Don—that is what my father called me, and I know no other," was the simple reply.

"Well, Don goes, and it is a good name; but now we will fill in this grave and then go and have a long talk together, for I wish to return you your horse, which I thank you for, and you can have the pony of the chief I killed."

"Thank you, but I've got ponies enough—no, do not you fill in the grave, for I wish to do it."

Buffalo Bill yielded the shovel to the youth, who quickly filled up the grave, and, throwing his utensils upon the little handcart, he said:

"Now we'll go to the cabin and get something to eat."

This Buffalo Bill was willing to do, and the youth, telling him that he was his guest, set to work and soon cooked a most tempting meal, surprising the scout with potatoes, turnips and bacon and eggs, he explaining that his father regularly planted a garden, and had brought the chickens from a settlement two years before.

Buffalo Bill glanced over the cabin, read the names of the books, looked at the pencil sketches and saw that the one who had dwelt there had certainly been a scholar and a man of refined tastes and accomplishments, whatever his crimes might have been.

When the meal was over and Buffalo Bill had lighted his pipe, the youth, looking at the warbonnet and weapons of the young Indian chief, which the scout had brought along, said:

"These marks tell who it was you killed."

"I see that you are up in Indian signs, Don."

"Yes, it was a young chief by the name of Blue Mark, for here are the three blue marks he cut upon his weapons—in fact, had upon everything he owned."

"His brother was one who came to kill me, and I guess Blue Mark was prowling about the house for the same purpose, but seeing you coming, thought he'd kill you too."

"If so I am glad I kept him from carrying out his intention."

"So am I, for he was a brave young chief and might have gotten me; but I don't want his pony, for if they come to look for the chief and found his horse here, they'd make it too hot for me."

"True, so I'll take the pony back with me and let them look him up at the fort; but, Don, why will you not go with me to the fort and give up this wild and lonely life?"

"I would like to, now you seem to want me, and the colonel and all were so good to me."

"Do you know it made me almost choke when I saw those ladies and the little girl, for I seemed to see my mother again."

"Poor boy, and you will find Mrs. Doan willing to treat you most kindly, for she is a noble woman, while I well know how the colonel feels toward you after all you have done for him, his command and those he loved."

"Yes, you must return with me to the fort, Don."

"Not now."

"Why not now?"

"Well, we've got to trap Indian Dick, you know."

"Ah yes; but I wonder what became of him, for his horse was killed and the men found his trappings, but he had disappeared."

"He has gone back to the village."

"Do you know this?"

"Yes, for he was here this morning."

"That man was here this morning?"

"I thought you were foes."

"We are, but he was a friend of my father's, and came here on foot for a horse and some food."

"I told him father had been wounded, was asleep, and I would not disturb him, so gave him a pony and some provisions and let him go."

"Why did you not capture him?" almost suspiciously asked Buffalo Bill.

"What would I have done with him?"

"No, I let him go, but as he spoke of getting father to help him in a plot to trap the soldiers and kill them, I let him talk, and thought I'd trap him, so told him I would let him know when father was well enough, and I will, and you can catch him."

"Don, you are a trump!" said Buffalo Bill, with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PLOT.

Until the shadows of night fell upon the valley Buffalo Bill sat talking to the Boy Hermit, for he had told him he would remain all night with him and return to the soldiers' camp the next day.

Supper was disposed of with a relish by the scout, and he accompanied the youth to the bars to see that they were all safe for the night and the horses could not stray.

Later they entered the cabin, and Buffalo Bill spread his blankets in what had been the bed of the man he had slain; but the youth did not seem to regard it as amiss, and the scout did not care to suggest that there was, and, in fact, did not dread that he would be haunted by grim specters in occupying the bed of one who a few hours before had been removed to his narrow bed in the earth.

The roar of the waterfall came to the ears of the scout, the yelp of a coyote was heard, and as he was sinking off into slumber an owl hooted weirdly in a tree near the cabin.

But Buffalo Bill was a son of the forest and plains, and such things had no terror for him.

Once or twice he awakened during the night, the last time to start as he saw the cabin door open and the moonlight streaming in.

But just then Don entered and said:

"I'm sorry if I disturbed you, but the coyotes made such a row I knew they were at father's grave, so I went out and shot several."

"Why, I heard no shots."

"No; I did not wish to disturb you, so shot them with bows and arrows."

"To-morrow I will put heavy stones on the grave."

"I fear you are not sleeping very well, Don."

"Oh, yes; I'm all right, for if you were not there I'd be lonesome."

"Once or twice when I heard you breathing I almost thought father was there and not in his grave."

The pathos of the words and tone touched Buffalo Bill, and he talked cheerily to the boy for quite a while, and then the two went to sleep.

In the morning, after breakfast, Don was heart and soul in the idea of catching Indian Dick.

He suggested to Buffalo Bill that he should go to the Sioux village, disguised as a redskin, and bring the renegade back with him.

"But they will kill you, Don," said the scout.

"They won't know me."

"How can you prevent it?"

"Well, you see, father called me half Injun, because I could paint up and appear just like one, and I speak the Sioux tongue just as well as they do."

"They have a big village, and it is scattered through a large valley up in the mountains, and I know it well."

"Indian Dick's tepee stands apart from the others, and I can go there at night, awaken him if he is asleep, and tell him my father wishes to talk with him about his plot to entrap the soldiers, and for him and the renegade chief Thunder Voice to come to the cabin here, but to come as Indians, and that will make them paint up, you know."

"I'll come back ahead of them, and you are to be here to catch them."

"It is a splendid plan, Don, if you are sure you will not get into trouble."

"No, indeed, for I'm all right," was the confident reply.

"I hope so; but I would like to have a pard of mine here with me."

"Who is it?"

"Nugget Nat, one of my scouts."

"All right, if he's your friend I'm willing."

"When do you wish to start?"

"Well, you see, I had better wait several days, so as to let Indian Dick think my father has had time to improve."

"Yes, for there must be no mistake, you know."

"No, there will not be."

"Well, I'll start for camp and take that Indian pony with me and will have Lieutenant Arthur Lowery send a courier to the fort to inform Colonel Doan that we are detained for a good reason for some days, so they will not be anxious there about the little command, and then I will come here with Nugget Nat."

"All right."

"How long will it take you to go to the Indian village and back?"

"I'll leave after dinner, so as to get there in the night, and well away before dawn, and will be back here the next morning."

"And the renegade chiefs will soon follow you?"

"Yes."

"Will they bring any braves with them?"

"Oh, no; for what they do they wish to get full credit for, and will only call upon the Indians when they wish to strike a blow."

"Good! they will walk right into our parlor, as the spider said unto the fly."

"It is a good plot, but the only thing that troubles me about it is that you take such chances."

Again came the answer, "Oh, don't mind me, for I'm all right."

When the plan was fully arranged Buffalo Bill mounted his own horse, and

with the horse of the young chief, Blue Mark, in lead, set out upon his trail back to camp, Don going with him as far as the bars, and seeing him start upon his way with a look of regret in his sad young face, as though he was losing another good friend.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

Buffalo Bill rode on his way, now mounted upon his own horse, and leading the Indian pony, on which were the weapons of the young chief and his war-bonnet.

He had much food for thought as he kept along the trail, for he had found in the young hermit a firm friend, and his friendship he intended to cultivate all in his power.

The Boy Hermit had shown him two well drawn maps of the country around his cabin home for sixty miles.

One was drawn by the old hermit, the other by himself, and when the youth had gone over both with the scout, explaining many things, it gave Buffalo Bill an idea of the lay of the land and the trails it would have taken months to go over and learn as well.

He told him, too, where the Indian villages were located, the strength of each, the approaches, hunting grounds, and much else the scout was glad to learn.

There was a much nearer trail to the camp of Lieutenant Lowery than the one Buffalo Bill knew, and which the Pinto pony had been the guide over, but the Boy Hermit had told the scout he would find great difficulty in going that way until he had been shown over it, so he stuck to the one through the lava valley.

He had reached the stream and entered it, and saw that he had to go down its bed, as the bank on the side where he would eventually land was impassable along there, rising boldly from the water to a height of six to sixty feet.

At last he came to where he had entered the stream when riding the pony, and, turning into the trail he had before followed, he cantered along until he was nearing the range, when all of a sudden he saw a number of mounted Sioux.

In moments of danger Buffalo Bill is one to think quickly and act promptly, and he saw at once that if he retraced his way he would have to retreat to the Boy Hermit's cabin, and he did not wish to compromise him.

He could not flank to either side, for the Indians cut him off on his right, the direct road to camp, and in the other direction he would be going far from the place he sought to reach, and into a country he was unacquainted with.

Remembering that upon the cliff, which he had scaled by aid of his lariat, that there was a ledge of rocks that afforded a splendid shelter to fight from, and where his horses would be protected as well, he dashed directly up the steep slope to this point.

If compelled to, he knew he could desert his horses, descend by his lariat, and make his way to the camp before he could be headed off.

The Indians gave a yell of delight at beholding him, and, spreading out their line, sought to surround him, but the dash up the slope prevented this.

They then yelled with triumph, for they considered him their sure prey now, and these yells turned to howls of rage as they recognized the pony of their young chief in the possession of the scout.

They, of course, at once set him down as the slayer of Blue Mark, and now was the time to get revenge.

"It's a band out on the scout for their

chief, and they recognize his horse, so I've got a hard job on my hands.

"Perhaps they will hear the firing in camp, yet it may be just too far off, so I must take my chances."

The scout spoke with the utmost coolness, and, reaching the ledge, quickly placed the horses in safety and wheeled in a well-protected spot to fight back his foes.

He had the rifle of the chief, and this he would fire first, after which he would use his repeating rifle, and leave his revolvers as a last resort.

The Indians seemed so sure of their game they did not hurry themselves.

Halting at the base of the range they dismounted and began to advance under cover of the rocks and timber.

They seemed to feel that they had a dangerous foe to deal with, as one who had killed the rising young chief Blue Mark must needs be.

But they felt sure of him. Seeing that they were delaying, Buffalo Bill hastily took his two lariats, ran to the tree growing upon the cliff and placed them there for quick use, he could draw them after him and prevent immediate pursuit.

Then he returned to his post and coolly counted his foes.

They were some three hundred yards away, but advancing steadily, as they flitted from rock to tree.

"I'll just show them what my rifle will do, fire one shot for luck," he muttered, and, taking aim at a large brave, some three hundred yards distant, he opened the fight with a deadly shot.

The brave leaped into the air and fell his length.

Instantly there was a scattering of the redskins to safer retreats, for they knew now that their foe could strike deadly blows, and at a distance their rifles and other weapons would not carry.

"I make just sixty braves and a chief, from which one is to be deducted; there are fifty-nine more than I would like to fight," grimly said the scout, as he threw another load in his rifle to replace the shot he had fired.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REAL RESCUER.

Having been taught caution by the scout's death-shot, the band of braves were more than ever determined to capture their foe, and therefore began to advance, though with greater caution than before.

Suddenly a shot was heard behind the scout, and a bullet flattened upon the rocks near his head.

"By the gods of war! but I am flanked. They are in the canyon behind me, and so retreat is cut off. But, if it is die, I'll not take the trail alone for the happy hunting grounds," and dauntless Buffalo Bill sought a position where he could not be seen by his foes down in the canyon.

His foes in front had heard the shot, and expressed their delight in loud yells, and Buffalo Bill then discovered that further down the range a warrior was signaling to others down in the canyon.

Standing firm and undaunted at his post, Buffalo Bill gave up hope, but, as we have seen, made up his mind to leave a record behind him of how he died.

As he drew bead upon another brave there was fired at him a score of rifles and double that number of arrows, with a few scattering shots from the canyon.

The arrows all fell short; the bullets pattered about him, but did no damage, while he once more touched the trigger of his rifle, and another brave bit the dust.

In wildest rage the Sioux yelled—yelled

only to suddenly have their cries checked by ringing cheers, a volley fired from carbines, and the splendid charge of thirty troopers right in upon the red ranks!

Their ponies having been captured first and driven up the slope, the redskins had to fly for their lives along the ridge, followed by the popping of carbines.

"Ho, Bill, in close quarters, eh?" cried Lieutenant Arthur Lowery, as he dashed up, his horse covered with foam.

"A trifle too close for comfort, sir; but you saved my scalp-lock, lieutenant, and there is no need of telling you how grateful I am."

"Don't mention it, Cody, for—"

"You heard the firing in the camp, then, sir, and came to the rescue?"

"Not a bit of it! We heard nothing; but that Boy Hermit dashed into camp and told us a band of over fifty Indians had corralled you on the cliff where the man fired at Colonel Doan, and other reds were in the canyon, so I must send a few men the other way and go with the main force around through the pass and save you."

"He gave his orders as though he were a colonel, directed me just how to go, and to send the party to the canyon, and then was off like a shot. Bill, that boy is a wonder!"

"He is indeed, sir; and I have more to tell you of him, for I left his cabin this morning, but how he got to camp ahead of me I don't know, though he cut trails on me, I guess. Hark! your men in the canyon are at work, and I'll push the pursuit along the range, if you think best."

"Yes, we will go together."

When the officer and the scout came up with the troopers pressing hard the flying Indians, they found that the band had suffered severely, and were scattering for their lives, not half a dozen of the braves being mounted, as nearly all of their ponies had been captured.

In the canyon Nugget Nat was leading a party of a dozen soldiers against the redskins there, a score in number, and had also captured their ponies, so that the whole band who had come to search for their young chief, Blue Mark, and avenge him, were scattering and flying for their lives, the soldiers having suffered but a trifling loss.

"This is our second victory, Cody, and we have now dealt the Sioux two telling blows," said Lieutenant Lowery as the two rode back toward camp.

"Yes, sir, and there is more work ahead," and Buffalo Bill told of his finding the Boy Hermit, and of the intended attempt to capture the two renegade white men, adding:

"It will be a grand thing, sir, to add to the two victories the capture of Indian Dick and his fellow-renegade, and also to carry back with us the Boy Hermit, who is really the one to whom we owe so much of our success."

"Indeed, it is to him, Cody, and yourself; but you think I had better change my camp, you said?"

"Yes, sir, over on the stream I spoke of, where I lost the trail, after wounding the old hermit."

"We can go there by night, after you have sent a courier to Colonel Doan, explaining delay. In the morning I will start for the Boy Hermit's cabin, taking Nugget Nat with me, and feeling confident in having you so near to call upon when needed."

This was the plan carried out. A courier was dispatched to the fort with a letter to Colonel Doan, the command moved to the new camping-ground over on the stream, and the next morning at dawn Buffalo Bill and Nugget Nat rode out of camp on their way to the cabin of the Boy Hermit.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BOY HERMIT'S MISSION.

"There he is, Nugget Nat," said Buffalo Bill, as the two scouts came in sight of the little cabin and beheld the Boy Hermit seated in front of the door engaged in work of some kind.

"Waal, he's a dandy from wayback," declared Nugget Nat, and, staking their horses out in the meadow, they were met by the Boy Hermit as they approached the ledge.

He gave them a warm welcome, and said:

"I am just overhauling my Indian outfit, and you'll see what a good Sioux I can make when I get rigged up."

"Yes, I have no doubt of that; but I also see that you say nothing about your rescuing me yesterday."

"How was that?"

"You are not going to deny it, I hope—how you went to Lieutenant Lowery and told him I was corralled by redskins."

"Yes, you see I went up to my lookout after you left, and I saw a band of Indians beyond the range, going on a trail that would about head you off, so I came back at a run, mounted Pinto, and rode for it by a short trail to head you off, but found I was too late. Then I went to your camp and set the lieutenant on the trail."

"I didn't want the Sioux to see me just now, for it was Chief Blue Mark's band; but I was near enough to know that the band got a severe whipping."

"And you deserve the credit of it, boy pard; but are you still determined to risk your life by going into the Sioux village?"

"Of course I am! I never back down! I'm all right," was the confident rejoinder, and Nugget Nat blurted out:

"You bet you are all right, kid. You are jest a whole kiln of bricks, you be!"

The Boy Hermit smiled and said:

"I guess I'll go to-morrow, for, after this last defeat the Sioux will keep close to their villages for a few days, at least."

So it was decided, and Buffalo Bill and Nugget Nat remained as the guests of the Boy Hermit, who gave them a great deal of information regarding the country that was new to them, showing them on his map just what trail he would take to the Indian village, of which he drew a sketch, and let them see just where the tepee of Indian Dick was located.

The young host gave his guest the best he had in his cabin, and toward noon the next day he began to prepare for his most perilous venture.

Buffalo Bill insisted that he should ride his horse, as the animal's wonderful speed and bottom could distance all pursuit, but the youth said that Pinto was well rested, and had not his superior in the Indian horse herd.

When at last he was "made up," both Buffalo Bill and Nugget Nat admitted that even in the bright sunlight they would never believe him to be a pale-face.

He had painted himself to perfection, and his every oddity of costume, movement and all was thoroughly Sioux.

"You'll pass, boy pard," decided Cody. "Ef yer don't, I'll eat my hat," said Nugget Nat.

With rifle, a revolver, bow, arrows, and knife, the youth was splendidly armed. He rode an Indian saddle, and carried only a bag of cooked provisions and one blanket.

The scouts escorted him to the end of the canyon, where he leaped nimbly upon his pony Pinto, and rode away, they returning to the cabin to remain until his return.

That night Buffalo Bill slept but little, for he was very anxious and uneasy about his Boy Hermit, and both he and Nugget

Nat grew almost nervous as the time drew near when they were to expect him back.

Knowing that it was possible he might return with the two renegades, the scouts went into the cabin to set their trap for their capture.

They had waited there about an hour, when Buffalo Bill exclaimed, as he was peeping out of the half-open door:

"There he comes!"

"And he's alone, pard Cody."

"Yes, but we must keep concealed."

They watched the youth ride up the canyon, saw him dismount and turn Pinto loose, the pony seeming to have been hard ridden, and then ascend the ledge.

But they did not appear until he called out:

"I'm back again, Mr. Cody, and all right!"

They met him at the door, looking just as thoroughly Indian as when he started, and Buffalo Bill asked quickly:

"Did you go to the Sioux camp, boy pard?"

"Oh, yes, that is just where I started for."

"And saw Indian Dick?"

"Yes. I left Pinto a mile from the village, and made my way into Indian Dick's tepee."

"He was asleep, but I aroused him and told him he was wanted at the cabin, and it was such a big thing that he must bring Thunder Voice with him, and the Indian chief Many Scalps also, for the plan could not be arranged without them."

"You see, Chief Many Scalps was one who wears a dozen pale-face scalps at his belt. He is a very bad Indian, and the big man of his tribe, so I thought, as there were three of us, we could match the three redskins."

"You are right; but will they come?"

"Oh, yes, for I made Indian Dick go and see both Thunder Voice and Many Scalps, while I waited in his tepee, and arrange with them, and they are to be here to-night."

"Good! We will be ready to receive them," assured Buffalo Bill, exultantly.

That would be a fight to a finish for a certainty.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HITTING BACK.

The Boy Hermit went on to tell the two scouts that Indian Dick seemed provoked with him for not allowing him to see his father when he came to the cabin, and said that he could not have been so badly wounded, if he was able to be out again; but he had told him that where the wound had been most painful at first, to his father, it had ceased to be so, now, and added:

"I had to tell him this, for I wished to make no mistake."

"When he came back from seeing Thunder Voice and Many Scalps I at once slipped out of the village and started upon my return."

"And the renegade and the Indian chief said they would come?"

"Yes, they were only too glad to get the chance, and Many Scalps gave orders for all of his braves to remain at the village in case he needed them at once."

"You see, the whole tribe was wild over their disappointment in not capturing Colonel Doan, and then at the three whippings they had received, for Blue Mark's band had returned, and all of them were eager—hot for any plan to get revenge."

Still keeping on his Indian rig, the Boy Hermit had his dinner, and then sought rest, while the scouts arranged for the reception of the two renegades, and the Indian chief.

It was just an hour before sunset when

three horsemen rode into the canyon, and Nugget Nat said:

"They is all Injins!"

"No; the two pale-faces are simply in Indian dress and war-paint," answered Don.

He went out to receive his visitors, meeting them in the valley.

Watching, the two scouts saw the Boy Hermit greet them, their horses were turned loose, and the four came up the steep path to the ledge.

As they drew near the door Indian Dick called out:

"Come, old man, git out here and greet ye'r pards!"

Immediately out stepped Buffalo Bill and Nugget Nat, revolvers in each hand, while Cody called out:

"Hands up, all of you, or you are dead men!"

"Trapped by that boy traitor!" shrieked Thunder Voice, and he sprang, knife in hand, upon the Boy Hermit, who was caught for a moment off his guard, not expecting the attack.

But Buffalo Bill's revolver cracked, and the renegade chief toppled over, dead when he struck the ground.

Indian Dick had attempted to draw a revolver, but thought better of it, and raised his hands in token of submission, while Many Scalps darted like a deer down the ledge, to suddenly, at the crack of the Boy Hermit's revolver, double up and roll over and over into the meadow below.

"It would not do to take any chances of his escape," averred Don, coolly, while Nugget Nat remarked:

"You got your man, Chief Cody, but cheated ther gallows; ther Boy Hermit hes got his game waitin' ter be picked up, and I has Injin Dick here covered fur keeps, so jist put a lariat around him to make him feel nice and snug."

This was quickly done, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Come! We must bundle those two dead men into the cabin and ride for camp, and you, Nat, can push on hard for the fort, if Lieutenant Lowery thinks best, for I believe if Colonel Doan knows that we have the three chiefs, and the braves are ordered to keep close to their villages, he will send a large force there to strike a final blow."

"And I will guide them," cried the Boy Hermit.

The horses were quickly caught and saddled, the animals of the three chiefs being taken along, for fear some straggler might visit the cabin and recognize them, and the party started at a rapid gallop for the camp of Lieutenant Lowery.

"There is the camp, and it is not yet sunset," announced Buffalo Bill, as they left the stream, calling out to the Boy Hermit, who, still disguised as a redskin, was leading the horses, while the renegade, Indian Dick, also in full war-paint and Sioux dress, rode by his side, securely bound to his horse.

"Don, see! Lieutenant Lowery saw your painted face and feathers, and is forming line of battle to fight Indians," called out Buffalo Bill to the Boy Hermit, as he saw the soldiers in camp rapidly mounting.

But Buffalo Bill and Nugget Nat, riding in front, were quickly recognized by the Lieutenant, and he met the party as they rode up. The story of the capture was quickly told him, and the suggestion made by the scout about sending a courier at once to inform Colonel Doan of the situation.

"The very thing," assented Lieutenant Lowery, and, ten minutes after, Buffalo Bill was riding hard toward the fort, to report the situation verbally.

It was just sunrise when the Boy Her-

mit, who was on the watch, reported soldiers advancing, and, five minutes after, Buffalo Bill appeared, mounted on a fresh horse, followed by his band of scouts at Fort Belvue, and with Colonel Doan himself at the head of a force of five hundred cavalry, mounted infantry, and three light guns.

They were greeted with cheers upon their arrival in camp, and the tired horses and men were allowed much-needed rest, for the Boy Hermit had said that they could remain in camp several hours, for he could guide the command to the Sioux village even after nightfall.

A council of war was then held, and, still in his Indian disguise, Don was in attendance, and warmly did Colonel Doan congratulate him upon his splendid services.

Then he heard the youth's plan to attack the village, and by ten o'clock the whole command set off on the march for the attack, Buffalo Bill and Don in the lead.

The vicinity of the Sioux village was reached, when a halt was made for a brief rest, but before dawn they were again on the march, and, guided to a splendid position by the Boy Hermit, Colonel Doan began the attack at daybreak by having light guns send shells bursting into the midst of the tepees.

The pale-faces were beating the Indians at their own game, but were also striking a blow at their homes, and a deadly blow it was—one that was long remembered by the Sioux, who were forced to fly further into the mountains to escape their terrible foes, leaving their villages and many prisoners in the hands of the victors, who returned to the fort after what was considered a most successful and telling campaign.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CONCLUSION.

One of the first things that was done at Fort Belvue after the return of the victorious little army was to try the renegade pale-face, Indian Dick.

As may be surmised, the trial was a short one, and the verdict of course was "Guilty!"

Quickly after the man whose life had been so crime-stained was hanged at the fort, and, as his renegade pard, Thunder Voice, the white outcast, had been killed, thus was the country rid of two execrable scoundrels who were more cruel than the Indians themselves.

As Don, the Boy Hermit, had decided to remain at the fort, as one of Buffalo Bill's scouts, he moved his traps there from his cabin, and then it was that Colonel Doan learned in full the strange story of the boy's life and what had been told him by his adopted father.

Trying to recall who the man could be that had tried to kill him, and was his sworn foe, Colonel Doan remembered a brilliant, splendid comrade of his younger life, who had gone to the bad, but was supposed to be dead.

"His name was Alfred Hamblin," he said, in speaking to Don and Buffalo Bill one day. "He was my rival for the hand of the lady who is now my wife, and my success turned his friendship for me into hatred."

"In fact, it seemed to make a wreck of him, for, soon after, he broke into my father's banking house and robbed it of a large sum of gold and paper money, besides many valuables kept on storage there in the vault by the depositors."

"There was silver plate, jewelry, and other articles, all of which he safely got away with. He was reported afterward, to have been killed out here on the frontier."

"My father made good all losses, but it

almost ruined him, and I lost what I supposed would be a large inheritance."

"Did you say his name was Alfred Hamblin, sir?" asked Don, who had learned, since his arrival at the fort, to put a sir on when addressing officers.

"Yes, Don."

"That name is on several of the pencil sketches my father made several years ago, sir."

"Then he is the man; and now I understand his enmity toward me, for, as I have stated, I married the lady he loved, and I also vowed I would certainly send him to prison if I could ever lay hands on him."

"Was the town in Maryland, sir, where you used to live?"

"Yes, in G—, Maryland."

"How far is that from Oxford, Maryland, sir?"

"Not many miles."

"Then I guess I can tell you where to find those valuables he stole from your father's bank, for he left me a legacy, and gave me a map telling me how to find where he had buried the treasure in the little cemetery at Oxford, which you can approach by water, the directions say; and he told me to go there and get the things."

"If you can do that, Don, it will be a great thing for you."

"Not for me, sir, for the things were stolen and belong to you, and I have a nice little sum in gold dust laid away at the cabin I can get at any time."

"You are as honest as you are brave, Don, and as Lieutenant Lowery goes East within a week, on leave, you can accompany him and find that buried legacy."

And go East Don did, not only to find the legacy, but also to look up his kindred, for, since his arrival at the fort, the ambition had been stirred in him to know just who he was.

The lieutenant accompanied him to Oxford, and there, buried in a grave, beneath the coffin that had rested there, was found the treasure—gold, jewelry and silver plate.

Having put this in safe keeping, subject to Colonel Doan's order, for there was every proof that it was the stolen property from the G— Bank, Don began to "get on the trail of himself," as he expressed it, still aided by Lieutenant Lowery.

In this he also met with success, for, with the locket in his possession, he found that his father's name was Darrel Kingdon—that he had emigrated, with his family, a wife and two children (little Darrel and a tiny sister), and had never been heard of after reaching the Wild West.

As scenes came back to him, memory was freshened and Don, the Boy Hermit, soon knew the whole story of his loved parents up to the time of their cruel death by the merciless Sioux.

At the suggestion of Colonel Doan, Darrel Kingdon—once Don, Buffalo Bill's Boy Hermit pard, determined to enter West Point. His services at Fort Belvue gained for him an appointment at large from the President, so he entered the National Military Academy and ended his career there with great honor to himself.

To-day Buffalo Bill has no better friend among the army officers than his once-called Boy Hermit, who to-day is known as Major Darrel Kingdon, of the —th Cavalry.

THE END.

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